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ABSTRACT

Fourteen papers are provided from a symposium to provide general input into the 1990 Unesco International Literacy Year by reviewing and documenting existing knowledge and current issues in the field of women and literacy with special emphasis on developing countries. Specific topics are as follows: the definition of literacy; review of methods; acquisition and retention of literacy among women; impact of literacy on individuals, family, and society; post-literacy follow-up strategies and methods; and future perspectives and scenarios. These topics are dealt with in the time perspectives of the past, present, and future. The three regions of Africa, Asia, and Europe are covered. The opening address is "International Literacy Year: What Is Its Significance for Women?" (Chlebowska). An introduction (Lofstedt) summarizes the papers both by author and by topic. The 12 chapters contain the following papers: "Literacy: Towards a Theoretical Framework" (Lofstedt); "Literacy: A Tool for the Empowerment of Women? Women's Participation in Literacy Programs of the Third World" (Lind); "Women's Literacy for Development" (Caillods); "Women and the Tradition of Reading around 1700: Examples from Sweden and Germany" (Johannson); "Literacy as a Catalyst for Development with Special Reference to Women in Zimbabwe" (Mupawaenda); "Post Literacy: An Equalizing Tool. The Case of Tanzania" (Sjostrom); "Women in Literacy Programs and Underdevelopment: The Case of Tanzania" (Kweka); "The National Literacy Programme and Gender Issues: The Case of Botswana" (Gaborone); "Women and Literacy: The Sri Lanka Experience" (Jayaweera); "Education for Women's Equality: A Pipe Dream? A Case from India" (Dighe); "The Future of Nonformal Education for Women in India" (Ekstrand); and "Challenges to the Attainment of Women's Literacy" (Stromquist). A participant list is appended. (YLB)

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# WOMEN AND LITERACY:
# YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

## Report from a symposium sponsored by the Nordic Association for the Study of Education in Developing Countries in Stockholm, June 1989

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# Women and Literacy:
# Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

*Report from the Hässelby Symposium on Women and*
*Literacy sponsored by the Nordic Association for the*
*Study of Education in Developing Countries*
*Stockholm, June 8-10, 1989*

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# Foreword

The Nordic Association for the Study of Education in Developing Countries (NASEDC) which was established in 1981, has as its overriding aims:

1) to promote research on education and the role of education in national development;
2) to facilitate increased contacts and exchange of experience between researchers and educators in the North and the South; and
3) arrange annual symposia on important topics in the field of education.

The following symposia have been conducted:

| | |
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| 1981 | Higher Education in the Third World (Oslo) |
| 1982 | Education and Planning in Developing Countries (Oslo) |
| 1983 | Foreign Aid for Education (Norway) |
| 1984 | Nordic Experiences of Competence Building in Developing Countries (Stockholm) |
| 1985 | North-South Educational Research Cooperation and Dissemination (Stockholm) |
| 1986 | From Policy Making to Implementation: The Role of Research and Evaluation in Educational Development (Jyväslylä) |
| 1988 | Education with Production (Ås, Norway) |

Since it's inception, the Nordic Association for the Study of Education in Developing Countries has worked in close cooperation with both the aid and the research agencies within the Nordic countries. The Association has also played an important role as a stimulus for students, researchers as well as policy makers in the field. During it's existence, support for education has been strengthened within the Nordic Aid Agencies, and more educational research has also been funded.

The 1989 symposium was organised jointly by NASEDC and the Swedish National Commission for Unesco at Hässelby with the assistance of staff members and students from the Institute of International Education, Stockholm University, from June 8-10, and was funded by the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA). In anticipation of the Unesco International Literacy Year 1990, the theme of the Symposium was *Women and Literacy: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.*

The main aim of this symposium was to provide a general input into the 1990 Unesco International Literacy Year by reviewing and documenting existing knowledge and current issues in the field of "Women and Literacy" with special emphasis on developing countries. More specifically, the symposium addressed such topics as:

- the definition of literacy;
- review of methods;
- acquisition and retention of literacy among women;
- the impact of literacy on individuals, the family and society;
- post-literacy follow-up strategies and methods; and,
- future perspectives and scenarios.

These topics were dealt with both in time and regional perspectives. The time perspective was applied to the past, the present and the future; and the three regions of Africa, Asia and Europe were covered.

On behalf of the Association, I would like to convey my appreciation to the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) for its financial assistance that made it possible not only to organise the symposium, but also to bring in distinguished scholars from different parts of the world to participate in this symposium. The fact that so many female researchers from different continents could converge to deliberate on the important issue of women and literacy was, in itself unique.

The editing of this volume was done at the Institute of Internatinal Education by Catherine Odora with the assistance of Jan-Ingvar Löfstedt and Vinayagum Chinapah; and to them, I would like to express my thanks.

Our final gratitude goes to the Swedish National Commission for Unesco which has introduced this volume as part of its series and has financed it's printing. It is our hope that this volume will contribute to an understanding of the role that women can play for the development of a better world.

Stockholm
December 1991

Ingemar Fägerlind
**President**
Nordic Association for the Study of
Education in Developing Countries

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## Opening Address

# International Literacy Year: What is its Significance for Women?

**Krystyna Chlebowska**
*Division of Primary Education,*
*Literacy and Adult Education in Rural Areas, UNESCO*

### The International Literacy Year: Main Objectives

On Wednesday 6, December 1989, the International Literacy Year was officially launched at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. This important action was taken following the approval of a report, during the twenty-fifth session of the UNESCO General Conference held at the organisation's Headquarters in Paris, containing a recapitulation of the background to and the goals of the International Literacy Year as defined on the basis of replies to questionnaires addressed to the member states.

As outlined by the conference, one of the objectives of the International Literacy Year is to increase action by Governments to combat illiteracy, particularly for women and girls in rural areas, but also for people in urban slums, and among populations and groups having special educational problems or needs.

The second objective is to increase public awareness and alert public opinion both to the high rate of illiteracy among adult women and its implications for the well-being of their children, and to the low rate of school participation among girls. Concurrent with this, is the objective to arouse awareness to the association between illiteracy and poverty, underdevelopment as well as economic, social and cultural exclusion.

UNESCO is also involved together with UNICEF, UNDP, and the World Bank in the organization of a regional conference on "Education for all" to be held in Thailand in march next year. This conference will incorporate a global action on the eradication of illiteracy and promote the advancement of primary and adult education.

## The ILY and its Significance for Women

Education of women is absolutely central to the goals and purposes of ILY considering particularly the fact that the problem of illiteracy is most severe among women. Of the 900 million adult illiterates in the world, over 60 per cent are women. Rural women in most developing countries represent half of the rural population, and the majority of them are illiterate.

Women, especially in rural areas, are the pillars in the survival of the family. They are responsible for most of the agricultural work and their role as educators of their children is both central and crucial. They produce the food, raise the children, and maintain the household; performing these tasks from early morning to late evening. And yet in some developing countries of Asia and Africa, 90 per cent of rural women are illiterate, which means that almost the totality of the female population in rural areas cannot read or write even if often they are able to count in their own limited way.

As for their daughters, they seldom attend school, because their education is not considered as a useful investment by the parents. Condemned to the chores of household duties while awaiting to join the dependency chain in the family of a future husband, sometimes against their own wish, young girls have very limited opportunities for study. Even when they manage to enter the first school cycle, the hazards of pregnancy or early marriage still prevent them from pursuing their education. By this vicious cycle, they drop out of the school system and come to join the already high and unfortunately increasing number of illiterates and semi-literates.

The importance of education and its positive effects on the status of women no longer needs to be proved. Education brings first of all an evolution in behaviour, enhances self image, increases self-confidence and makes women more conscious of the role they play, or could play in the society, as well as of the rights they have or they could benefit from the society and the nation at large.

There is also a direct relation between the level of education of women and health, hygiene and nutrition of their children. Various studies have shown that infant mortality rates are higher or lower depending on the mother's level of education. Many researches also demonstrate the positive impact of literacy on the attitude of mothers towards the education of their children, especially their daughters. It has also been demonstrated that literate women show more interest in community life and speak more easily in public. Of all these considerations, one of the most convincing is the improvement and increase of the income-generating activities of literate women, which advocates that urgent and priority action should be taken to establish literacy for girls and women.

Nevertheless programmes and projects aiming specifically at eliminating illiteracy of girls and women are not very common. The decision-makers, almost always men, are reluctant to embark into the risky venture of literacy programmes for women. It is very seldom that development plans feature this item. One can only speculate that a combination of high costs and a general absence of methodological and operational precedence in dealing with this issue might be contributory to this omission.

One of the reasons why it is so difficult to undertake any literacy action for women, especially for women in rural areas, is the limited time they have available. Often, confronted with more immediate preoccupations directly linked to survival, women do not necessarily consider literacy as a priority. They do not always understand the interest of the literacy projects proposed to them, especially if they have not been directly involved in both the planning and execution of those projects. The unwillingness of women to attend courses given by men, learning programmes whose content is too far away from their preoccupations and real interest, do not encourage women to participate in literacy classes. Added to this is the problem of the language in which literacy training should be given and the shortage of adequate literacy and post-literacy materials.

The International Literacy Year offers an exceptional opportunity to alert decision-makers and world public opinion to these problems and to launch appropriate action in favour of literacy for women. The programme of ILY is to be a summons to action, not a celebration. Successful literacy work, especially as it involves women and takes on special, social, economic and cultural dimension, requires *praxis*: reflection upon possible action, along lines which seem plausible and promising, analysis of such action, then further reflection, followed by further action. That is why our meeting, if I understand its purposes correctly, is not an exercise in abstract thought, but precisely an instance of praxis.

## Conclusion

The ILY Secretariat asked me to emphasize that an important part of the activities in which it is engaged concerns women. However these activities, although very important in relation to the Secretariat resources, are also absolutely insignificant when seen in relation to the vast global problem of improving educational opportunities for women.

Through publications and in other ways, efforts are being made to highlight the special problem of illiteracy among women. There is a proposal by the Joint United Nations Information Committee to produce a "kit" on the theme of Literacy and Women. UNESCO is also seeking to encourage the UN family, especially UNIFEM, UNICEF, WHO and the Department of Public Information of the United Nations, to join forces with the Organization in producing a high quality videocassette on the way which illiteracy among women affects the achievements of each agency's goals.

I have brought, for presentation to this symposium, copies of the first issue of the ILY newsletter which provides information on recent developments relating to International Literacy Year, a practical guide for non-governmental organizations, UNESCO Clubs, Associated Schools and other interested groups, issued by the NGO/UNESCO Standing Committee, as well as a special issue on literacy of the UNESCO monthly publication "*Sources*"; and, for each of the participants, a badge specially designed for ILY.

On behalf of the ILY Secretariat I would like to convey our warm thanks and deep appreciation to the Nordic countries for the support that they have given to the ILY in terms of both technical personnel and financial contribution to the ILY fund. Finally, I would like to end my presentation by re-emphasizing that International Literacy Year is both a challenge and an opportunity to help provide education to illiterate girls and women. It is also an opportunity to press for and focus attention on this urgent and crucial problem in order that it should no longer be wished away. In short, the ILY is an opportunity which should not be missed.

# Introduction

**Jan-Ingvar Löfstedt**
*Institute of International Education, Stockholm University*

Apart from the first chapter which attempts to provide a theoretical framework for the other contributions to this volume, all other chapters are papers that were presented and discussed at the Hässelby symposium. Here we will prepare the reader for what lies ahead by giving a brief presentation of the different contributions both author-wise and topic-wise.

## Organization of the Volume

Agneta Lind, who wrote her doctoral dissertation on literacy campaigns in Mozambique and who now works for SIDA, in her contribution, examines literacy as a tool for the empowerment of women and provides a review of the widening gender disparities in literacy attainment in times of worsening economic constraints in different regions of the world. The various constraints to, and motivational factors affecting women's participation, as well as the relationship between literacy promotion and other development activities, are other topics dealt with by Lind, who sees literacy promotion primarily as a means of political mobilization.

In the next contribution, Françoise Caillods from the International Institute for Educational Planning in Paris, makes an inventory of the problems of female illiteracy and presents a broad statistical overview which highlights the need for literacy promotion among women in the world, and argues that in spite of the urgency of the problem, simply too little has been achieved so far. At the same time, she is critical of some over-ambitious programmes which are launched with more zeal and political rhetoric than realistic assessment of the actual situation of the learners. Caillods then goes on to discuss the relationship between education and development and deal with some of the benefits that will accrue not only to women but also to society at large as a result of further efforts to promote literacy among women.

Next comes Professor Egil Johansson from the Umeå University in Northern Sweden who provides a historical perspective on literacy development. Professor Johansson has contributed significantly to our knowledge about the relationship between literacy and industrialization by showing, with the remarkable help of Swedish parish records, that neither schooling nor industrialization need be correlated with high or even universal levels of literacy. In his contribution to this volume he demonstrates, however, the crucial role that literacy has played in the evolution and sustenance of the popular movements in Sweden, which in their turn contributed significantly to the development of the "Swedish model" with its unique bargaining system and combination of a strong public sector and a free market system. Johansson presents an illuminating illustration of the development of the reading traditions in Sweden and Germany basing himself on rare archive materials from the 17th and the 18th centuries.

After Johansson's chapter follows special country reports from Africa starting with a discussion by Anna C. Mupawaenda, from the University of Zimbabwe in Harare, who takes up the theme of literacy as a catalyst for development. She discusses the relationship between literacy and development and their relevance to the women of Zimbabwe. Ms. Mupawaenda also emphasizes the importance of "topical" functional literacy which, as part of the post-basic literacy curriculum, provides, among other things, practical and valuable competencies in budgeting, shopping, everyday law, environment protection and so on.

The second African case is dealt with by Dr. Margareta Sjöström, also from the Umeå University, on post-literacy as an equalizing tool in Tanzania. She highlights the specific curricula mechanism of the post-literacy programme in that country. She gives a long list of both general and sector-specific recommendations regarding the textbooks used in post-literacy programmes, cautioning, for instance, against the use of words and expressions that are loaded with traditional values and are reflections of the old sexual division of labour. She also warns against over-optimistic promotion of income generating activities among women without the necessary realistic assessment of the constraints and the required inputs in the form of capital, material resources, and human competence.

Like Dr. Sjöström, Aikael K. Kweka from the University of Dar es Salaam, in his chapter, deals with the case of Tanzania and discusses women in literacy programmes in the context of underdevelopment. He traces Tanzania's adult education and national literacy efforts, examines the challenge of sustaining literacy, and concludes with the assertion that women need the combined support of all progressive forces, male and female, and that such a combination of forces should, in turn, work to bring about a new international economic order.

In the last chapter on Africa, Samora Gaborone from the University of Botswana, discusses how state run programmes in a capitalist setting such as Botswana within the context of the system of international division of labour reproduces power relations and ideological forms in the interest of the ruling class. Gaborone also argues, that adult education, particularly in a capitalist social formation, reflects the interest of the ruling alliance by developing and legitimizing the social division of labour and power relations in the capitalist mode of production. Looking at the National Literacy Programme (NLP) in Botswana, Gaborone argues that as far as the contents were concerned the primers in home economics were conceptualized in terms of domestic utility based on patriarchal assumptions about women as mothers and wives and as domestic labour.

The first of the special reports from Asia begins with a discussion of the literacy diffusion patterns in Sri Lanka using empirical and statistical data obtained from a number of surveys and censuses conducted in that country. In so doing, Swarna Jayaweera from the University of Colombo, illustrates how high education participation has had a dramatic impact in reducing disparities in educational opportunities and raising overall literacy rates not only across regions but also across sexes.

The second case in the Asian block is India which is dealt with by two contributors. Anita Dighe from the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi takes a critical look at a pilot project called "Education for Women's Equality" (Mahila Samakhya), which is currently being carried out in three Indian states, and asks whether it is likely to bring about empowerment of women. Dighe examines the contradictions in the very optimism contained in the "awareness" and "consciousness-raising" objectives of education on the one hand, and the rigid social, class, and race structure of the Indian setting on the other, and she suggests that the whole claim of "education for women's equality" may, at best, remain a "pipe-dream".

Also looking at the Indian context, Professor Lars-Henrik Ekstrand from the University of Lund in Southern Sweden sees literacy promotion for women as part of the sub-sector of non-formal education (NFE), an area that is vital for development but at the same time in need of much improvement and support. Ekstrand discusses in concrete detail many of the problems faced by the NFE literacy centres in India related to light, equipment, climate, health, bilingualism and motivation, and suggests a number of steps that could easily be taken to resolve some of the problems.

In the concluding theoretical block of the volume, Professor Nelly Strömquist from Standford University looks at the challenges to the attainment of women's literacy anchored in the patriarchal ideology which assumes, among other things, sexual division of labour and control of women's sexuality. The tasks and roles assigned to women as mothers and wives are assumed by this ideology to be "natural". The patriarchal ideology as a superstructure corresponds to a structural base, and various constraints that women face, such as lack of time, early marriage, and long distances, are thus not dysfunctional problems but functional elements in the basic structure.

In the more programmatic part of her contribution, Strömquist discusses possible strategies to reach out to women and mobilize them through literacy promotion. These strategies include adjustment to women's needs in temporal and spatial arrangements and the combination of literacy skills and income generating skills. Strömquist also challenges the assumption that productivity and equity are in conflict and that the emancipation of women must wait until survival of the poor has been guaranteed.

## Selected Topics

After the brief overview of the contributions to this volume in the previous section we shall now look at some of the issues and policy options that were discussed at the Hässelby symposium and that need to be settled before literacy strategies can be developed and literacy interventions designed. The list of issues is primarily given here in anticipation of the themes dealt with in the remaining chapters and is not intended to be exhaustive.

## Literacy, Skills Formation, and Awareness-Raising

Several participants in the Hässelby symposium dealt with the relationship between language skills, vocational skills, and socio-political awareness resulting in empowerment. A number of different problems are involved here:

1. Should literacy classes also impart skills for income generation?
2. Should literacy promotion, skills formation and awareness raising be regarded as components of the same package or as separate programmes?
3. What is the preferable sequence between the three?

As opposed to Nelly Strömquist, Agneta Lind argued that literacy programmes integrated with skill development aimed at income generating activities seldom prove successful, and she was more concerned with the awareness-raising aspect of literacy. It is probably important to carefully examine potential conflicts between literacy promotion and skill development but there are also examples of reasonably successful combinations as in the case of Bangladesh referred to below. At the same time, literacy classes including awareness-raising empowerment aspects may not be tolerated by the local or national (male) power elite in many countries.

Françoise Caillods, like Lind, warned against too many (competing) components in literacy programmes, but she also argues that literacy interventions should be *linked* to other development programmes. Literacy should not be seen as an end in itself but as a means of participating in other activities which can improve the situation of the poor and of women. A similar view was held by Lars-Henrik Ekstrand, who discussed the need for integrated package interventions where literacy is one of several components.

Lind mainly sees a conflict between basic literacy promotion and skill development arising from the fact that the two compete for limited time. She cites an evaluation which indicates that when an attempt was made to combine them, the success rate was very modest and that women in particular didn't seem to benefit from such a program load. There is obviously ample evidence to support her argument, but one can also find evidence that the inclusion of relevant skills formation in literacy programmes may increase the motivation of women to participate. The fact that many functional literacy strategies seem to reproduce gender inequalities should perhaps not be taken as proof that the idea of combining literacy and vocational skills development is entirely wrong. It may rather be a matter of how the programme is designed and the curricular contents.

The experiences of BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) and the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh have shed interesting light on the issue. One argument often heard is that skill development (if possible, combined with access to cheap capital in the form of credits) should be the starting point paving the way for successful literacy classes. The Grameen Bank people in fact argue that credits is the real catalyst and that the motivation for skill development and literacy will follow automatically. The experience of BRAC, on the other hand, shows that awareness-raising literacy courses create the motivation for collective income generation and thus sensitizes participants to the need for vocational skill development.

Whether literacy promotion should be primarily awareness-raising, or of the economically functional type, or a combination of the two, or simply stand on its own legs, remains a controversial issue. It can probably not be discussed in general terms but has to be related to specific national contexts. It is, however, also safe to say that much more comparative and evaluative research is needed in order to assess the various socio-economic outcomes of the different strategies.

## Government Versus Non-Government Literacy Efforts

Many participants pointed to the need for complementary government and non-government (NGO) efforts to promote literacy. This question, however, also relates closely to the question of what political forces or system the government represents and the difference between democratic and non-democratic governments. The question can also be said to be closely related to the fundamental problem of literacy for change as opposed to literacy for preservation of reproduction of the existing social order. Anita Dighe, in her paper, asks a number of questions around this issue: Under what conditions do women see the value of literacy? What benefits can they expect from it? How can literacy programmes on the terms of the powerful appeal to poor suppressed women? Do literacy campaigns, like formal education, tend to reproduce power relations and social differences? If a literacy campaign is person-centred rather than system-centred and if the system remains the same, what difference can literacy make?

Anita Dighe also discusses the parameters of "empowerment" in the context of government sponsored literacy campaigns. Can a government be expected to support a process of literacy promotion that aims at the redistribution of power away from the centre to the low-power periphery?

Agneta Lind represents a more optimistic view of government run mass campaigns perhaps mainly because she cites examples from countries like Cuba and Vietnam which have proven themselves rather successful. But then the governments in these countries, at least in the early days, were led by revolutionaries who wanted to change the old system and mobilize the masses of the people. Also in these countries, however, sustaining literacy among women has remained a problematic area. A somewhat similar type of "mobilizing" government is found in Tanzania which has a good record of literacy promotion. One problem evident from the Tanzanian case, however, has to do with the conflict between top-down central planning, on the one hand, and grassroots level motivation and participation, on the other. Just like the grassroots seldom seem to get a chance to influence the design and contents of literacy campaigns, the special needs of women are seldom considered in literacy primers, for instance, one aspect that naturally affects the level of motivation of women.

The perhaps most critical political economy approach to government run literacy is found in the contribution by Samora Gaborone, who discusses the relationship between literacy efforts and the political and economic context in the case of Botswana. Gaborone is also a proponent of the World System Theory, according to which education should not be analyzed in a national context only but has to be viewed in relation to the international division of labour and hegemony.

Whereas Kweka in his contribution focuses on functional literacy that promotes productivity, Gaborone is more concerned with awareness-raising literacy that can empower women and promote their emancipation. It is exactly from this Freirean perspective that he criticizes the literacy campaign in Botswana which, according to Gaborone, imparts literacy skills but at the same time reproduces the unfair gender roles, and is based on the assumption that women are primarily mothers and wives rather than change agents.

## Are Women More Motivated Than Men?

Whereas Anita Dighe strikes a rather pessimistic note in her critical assessment of the Mahila Samakhya (Education for Women's Equality) in India, Agneta Lind (focusing more on the African context) notes that more women than men participate in literacy classes, and this is not just a reflection of the fact that female illiterates outnumber their male counterparts. Women in many cases seem to be more motivated than men, but their attendance is more irregular and the dropout rate tends to be higher since they face more practical constraints than men.

A special case of female motivation is found in African countries like Botswana, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe where women, who are responsible for the household and separated from their husbands working in South Africa far away from home, tend to be more active learners. Although this seems to hold in Southern Africa, the scenario in South-East Asia gives a slightly different picture. Sri Lanka for instance, is a country with a remarkably high level of female literacy, or nearly 80 per cent. According to Swarna Jayaweera, Sri Lanka differs from many other countries in that parents seem to have the same educational aspirations for their sons as for their daughters.

Aikael Kweka, in his contribution, warns against treating all women as a homogeneous group disregarding the socio-economic differences among them. His observation that the poor women are the most important target group for literacy promotion, however, leads us to a dilemma that has to be properly identified. The really poor women, who suffer most oppression and hardship, often tend to have the least strength and motivation to engage in literacy efforts. Efforts to reach out to the poorest therefore tend to be classified as the least successful and there is likewise a tendency to allocate resources to more successful programmes so that at the end of the day those who need most support get the least. Often decision-makers seem to forget that programmes facing greater problems of necessity are less cost-effective than programmes with lesser problems.

## Are Men Opposed to Female Literacy?

The attitudes of husbands to literate wives seem to vary considerably across different cultures. There is reason to believe that certain cultures and countries are more male dominated than others, but whether culture and religion are causal factors is a moot question. Aikael Kweka points to customary law, traditional values, and some religious beliefs as important obstacles in the way of women's emancipation. But there are also indications that gender disparities are more pronounced in low-income groups than in high-income groups, as pointed out by Jayaweera. There are many examples of husbands who perceive of the wife's literacy as a threat to his own power position, just like there are many examples of local power holders who fear literacy among the poor and see a political threat therein.

One should perhaps, in a short-term perspective, be aware of the fact that promotion of female literacy also can have adverse effects for the women themselves. It is both possible and likely that the empowerment of women, through for instance literacy, in a traditional setting may in some cases prove counter-productive by creating new problems for the women, such as divorce and harassment, so that in the end the women may be "worse off" than before they became literate. This argument should, of course, not be seen as an excuse for not promoting literacy among women, but additional steps may have to be taken to protect the interests of the women.

## Is Female Illiteracy a Technical or a Structural Problem?

Nelly Strömquist devotes her contribution to a very thought provoking discussion of the constraints to women's literacy and argues that there is a need for a consistent theory that enables us to see the pattern behind the obstacles to female literacy. In her view, factors such as lack of time and early marriage are not just accidental obstacles but part of a male imposed logic that has to be exposed. Women's motivation, or lack of motivation, is thus one example of psychological factors that are predicated on a deeper structure. The issue at stake here is thus whether female illiteracy should be regarded as a dysfunctional manifestation of poverty and lack of resources, or whether it should be seen as a structural-symbolic phenomenon which is functional in a male dominated hierarchical system.

## Chapter One

# Literacy: Towards a Theoretical Framework

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### Introduction

This chapter seeks to provide a theoretical backdrop against which the Hässelby papers can be understood and thus prepare the reader for the following chapters of this volume, and it attempts to do this by taking as its point of departure three basic assumptions about literacy promotion:

First of all, illiteracy should be seen as lack of cultural capital and mental human competence closely interrelated with poverty, oppression, and unequal distribution of power and human resources in society. Interventions to promote literacy, if expected to yield results, must be globally designed, based on proper definitions of the problem to be solved and the context, setting relevant targets, prescribing proper methods, and ensuring efficient and effective implementation. All the ramifications of such an endeavour can be visualized graphically as an operation map which identifies the main elements of a literacy programme and where the strategic decision points are marked. This paper starts by drawing such an operation map and discussing some of the strategic points.

Secondly, any intervention to eradicate or reduce illiteracy must be based on a strategic conception of the economic, political, and psychological situation, that is to say, the context of poverty and power distribution as well as the culture of poverty. What are the objective and subjective implications of being poor and powerless? What are the mental and physical assets of the poor upon which literacy interventions can build, and what are the particular constraints and handicaps that must be overcome? The second section of this paper discusses human competence development, such as literacy promotion, in the contexts of poverty, oppression, and cultural deprivation.

Thirdly, the promotion of literacy must be part of a comprehensive strategy to develop not only basic literacy but also other fundamental resources and competencies in human beings which are necessary for survival and life improvement. The ability to master the written language alone can never feed the starving, cure the sick, strengthen the weak, or emancipate the oppressed.

This paper thus sets out to provide a tentative theoretical framework for the other contributions to this volume by attempting to:

a) draw an operation map of literacy intervention;
b) identify the context of poverty and oppression; and
c) place literacy within the framework of human development.

## An Operation Map of Literacy

The following presentation represents a simple adaptation of the Mind Mapping Technique (e.g. Buzan 1974) and can be graphically visualized as a cob-web system of clusters or interrelated nodes indicating the territory of literacy and the relationship between different aspects of literacy promotion. The central key clusters of literacy as an area of research and knowledge as well as operationalised intervention is tentatively given in Figure 1:1 below.

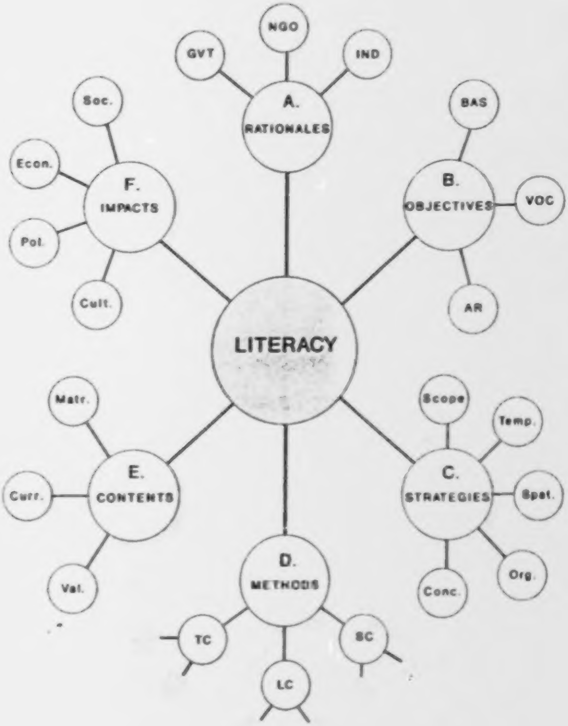

Figure 1:1 Central Part of Literacy Operation Map

The rationales-cluster (A. in the figure) comprises three main actors comprising government agencies, non-government organizations, and individual learners. These actors may or may not have conflicting or coinciding reasons for fighting illiteracy. Examples of rationales for promoting or participating in literacy interventions are listed in Table 1:1 below.

Table 1:1 Literacy Rationales

| Government Agencies | Non-Government Agencies | Individual Learners |
|---|---|---|
| -improved communication<br>-mass mobilization<br>-emancipation<br>-ideological control<br>-national development: economic, social and cultural<br>-international pressure | -humanitarianism<br>-proselytization<br>-emancipation<br>-mobilization<br>-partisanship | -productivity<br>-cultural development<br>-empowerment<br>-political influence<br>-life quality |

The objectives-cluster (B) (Figure 1:1) is, of course, derived from the different rationales of the different actors involved but also usually has three alternative orientations namely: basic educational, vocational, and awareness-raising. As indicated in the Introduction, the problem here is whether or not to combine two or all three orientations and to determine the sequence and the relationship between the different objectives.

The strategies-cluster (C), again, is in one sense derived from the rationales and the objectives and dependant on whether the actors are government, non-government, or individual learners, but it is also predicated on a number of policy and organizational considerations such as: (a) scope; (b) temporal arrangement or phasing; (c) spatial arrangement; (d) organization and administration; and (e) degree of concentration, selection, and targeting.

A literacy intervention may take the form of an all-out mass campaign or select specific target groups. It may be one concentrated effort within a given time limit or a series of steps or phases. It may use different venues, such as schools, temples, churches, homes, or other places and different teachers or instructors may be mobilized, such as school teachers, students, soldiers, or retired civil servants.

The methods-cluster (D) relate to a wide variety of teaching-learning arrangements which could for instance:

- be teacher-centred, learner-centred, or subject-centred;
- be predicated on different definitions of 'knowledge';
- use different models of communication and learning;
- be more or less group dynamic and learner-active or more or less teacher authoritarian;
- use the Freirean method of "generative themes";
- allow more or less discussion in class;
- use different spatia-temporal arrangements teaching in the homes, in centres, or in schools at times more or less adjusted to the needs of the participants;
- use the spelling method or the phonetic method; or,
- use different types of audio-visual techniques.

The contents-cluster (E) is comprised of items such as curriculum and syllabus guidelines; the production, distribution, and use of textbooks and various teaching materials; more or less hidden value patterns and ideological assumptions regarding Society, Authority, Politics, Power, Work, Order and Discipline, Gender Relations, Religion, Tradition and Culture.

The impacts-cluster (F), finally, comprises different types of outcomes such as tested achievement, short-term effects on behaviour and life situation, long-term impacts on economic, social, cultural, political, demographic, and educational development; as well as different evaluation strategies such as normative and summative, quantitative and qualitative, and rationalistic or naturalistic (Bhola 1991:42).

All options mapped out above, in most cases, have to be related to the context of poverty and oppression, which is our next topic.

## Competence Development in a Context of Poverty and Oppression

### Some Basic Concepts

As noted by for instance Lind and Strömquist in this volume, illiteracy among women is often linked to poverty and oppression. Literacy is in this chapter also seen as closely related to the terms poverty, poverty alleviation, emancipation, and the development of resources in human beings. Literacy, as the mastery of written communication, should be understood as one of several competencies that human beings need to cope with life, and literacy promotion is thus subsumed under the concept of human resource development, or rather, the development of resources in human beings. The term "human resource development" is problematic and ambiguous in the sense that there is usually either a tendency to view the term in a narrow and economistic way as referring to the development of human capital needed to complement financial and technological inputs into specific economic activities, or to see it as the creation of physical and mental competencies for individuals and societies to realize their full potentials. In the perspective outlined in this paper, the second meaning, i.e. "development of resources in human beings", is intended.

More than one billion people or about one-third of the total population in developing countries live in poverty with an annual per capita consumption worth less than US$ 370. The great majority of them are illiterate. Poverty is mainly found in rural areas although urban poverty has been increasing in the last decades in some regions of the world. Most poor have little land or are completely landless. They often live in large households, but the most destitute usually form small family groups. Poverty is closely related to environmental degradation and the poor both suffer from and cause environmental problems (World Bank 1990).

Poverty is one of the overriding problems in the contemporary South. It is basically a result of low productivity in combination with political and structural factors resulting in the unequal distribution of insufficient resources among the population. To this can be added large-scale degradation of the natural environment which also reduces the survival chances of many poor. The struggle against poverty has to be fought on two fronts, however. While, on the one hand, increased production and an equitable distribution of goods and services has to be ensured through political and economic means, on the other hand, the poor themselves have to be mobilized and empowered in order to be able to improve their own situation.

Illiteracy is in most cases one aspect of poverty as a state of deprivation (or a process of deprival) not only of basic human and material resources but also of power and equal rights. Poverty - as a state and as a process - is characterized by low levels of consumption of goods and services needed to satisfy basic human needs, and limited possession of resources or physical and mental assets that human beings need in order to play an active and self-fulfilling role in their own development as well as that of society. The poor are usually victims of forces that are beyond their control. The condition of powerlessness is perpetuated by their limited access to resources, lack of educational opportunities and inadequate organizational capacity.

The conception of poverty as a state and a process is here borrowed from Naila Kabeer (1988) who lets one refer to the level of "satisfaction of physiological and socially determined needs and priorities, while the other refers to the interlocking sequence of events, changing entitlements and outcomes by which individuals move from a higher to a lower level of well-being" (p. 8). Many poor so lack the means to assure physical survival itself that security and self-respect often take second place in their coping strategies. If these people don't see the acquisition of literacy as a means of increasing survival chances we cannot expect them to invest much time or effort in it.

Chambers (1983:111-114) relates poverty to the basic concepts of physical weakness, isolation, vulnerability, and powerlessness. Poverty means, among other things: shortage of food, clothes and shelter; low labour productivity; little control over the means of production; irregular supply of cash and food; long working hours; and dependence on others. Physical weakness follows from shortage of nutritious food and medical care and from bad hygienic standards. Parasites, sickness and malnutrition interact. Pregnancies, birth, and death frequently affect the life situation of the poor. Birth weights are low and bodies are stunted.

## Women and Poverty

Among the poor, women are an especially vulnerable group. Most poverty surveys look at household income and do not record variations within households. However, in terms of nutrition, personal wealth, education, and decision-making authority, women are almost invariably more handicapped than men. In times of extra difficulty, the first step is for the family to "tighten its belt". In such cases, the women and children will bear the greater degree of nutritional deprivation and their illnesses will go untreated. If the hard times continue, the family will begin to dispose of its meagre assets, usually trying to hold on to what limited means of production exist, such as livestock or land, selling items considered dispensable for survival. The woman's personal assets, such as ornaments, are usually among the first to go leaving her without resources.

If a family is able to educate only one of its children, it will normally be the son who is considered more important for survival and security. A daughter is expected to join her husband's family at the time of marriage and investment in a girl's education is therefore seen to have little survival utility.

As a family's situation continues to deteriorate, the woman is likely to be left with only her manual labour to sell, and she will be forced to work at much lower wages than a man. Finally, if the situation becomes extreme, the family unit itself may begin to break apart. A husband is likely to cut his losses by abandoning his family and leaving his wife to fend for herself and her children. Female headed poor households constitute an extremely vulnerable group in need of special and strictly targeted support.

## Poverty and Power

Although poverty in a sense can be seen as the discrepancy between the size of the population and available resources, it is usually the structural and distributional reasons for poverty that are the most important ones. Referring to the case of Bangladesh, Moore Lappé & Collins (1977:19) make the point in the following words:

> Why is the extraordinary food potential of Bangladesh unrealized? Not because there are too many people but because an elite few prevent the majority from having access to the country's resources. Without access to those resources, the majority of the people not only do not benefit from them but their initiative and energies do not go into making those resources more productive.

One factor contributing to the perpetuation of poverty is the inability of the poor to mobilize what is potentially their most valuable asset: their collective and organizational strength. The social networks of the poor tend to be vertical and characterized by dependence and inequality. Survival depends on the forming of a client relationship to a powerful patron, reliance upon moneylenders, and ties of kinship. Inadequate organizational ability on the part of the poor is due partly to the lack of relevant competencies, including literacy, and partly to resistance from the local elites who use their considerable powers to maintain status quo. Since the poor live so precariously close to the margin of survival, they cannot afford to jeopardize the relationships upon which they depend. Many literacy learners, both men and women, have dropped out from their classes after intimidation from their patrons but some women have also been forced by their husbands to leave.

## The "Culture of Poverty" and the "Culture of Silence"

Before designing literacy interventions one must understand the psychology of the poor. How does it affect people's minds and their mental set-up to live in poor, traditional, and "backward" societies and constantly be engaged in a daily struggle for survival? What type of knowledge do the poor possess? What particular skills do they develop? What limitations are they affected by as a result of constraints and hardships?

In many cases, manifestations of poverty such as: powerlessness, lack of control, lack of education, and lack of contact with the modern world, have in their turn led to the formation of attitudes and beliefs which become obstacles to change and improvement. Examples of such attitudes sometimes found among the poor are: low level of work discipline, punctuality, and orderliness; superstitious beliefs; lack of initiative; fatalism; submissiveness to authority and exploitation; low aptitude for cooperation and lack of trust; low standard of hygiene; and a tendency to minimize risk rather than maximize profit (Study on Non-Formal Education. Revised Draft Report. UNESCO, Dhaka: January 1988:111-120).

The term "Culture of Poverty" has here been borrowed from Fuglesang and Chandler (1986) but is used with somewhat different connotations. It is naturally a rather controversial term and can easily be misused in a derogatory and condescending sense. What is meant here, however, is that poor people over the years develop complex sets of behaviour patterns and attitudes in response to the difficult situation of deprivation that they live in. The behaviour of the poor is often highly rational given the context, but since the context itself is a complex and contradictory mixture of traditions of superstition, exploitation, common sense, traditional wisdom, lack of scientific knowledge, error and trial, defeat, etc., the net result is that the poor are in some sense also mentally and culturally handicapped in their struggle for survival.

Literacy works through the medium of language which carries thought. Poverty alleviation (including literacy promotion) should promote productive activities and introduce through language, new thinking and new technology not only as a means to raise income and improve the well-being of the poor, but also as an integrated part of the human resource development strategy resulting in more modern thinking.

In the literature on poverty, we find two opposing views on the effects of poverty on the mental abilities of the poor. One view may be represented by Paulo Freire who argues that the poor, although potentially capable of complex thinking and conceptualization, are submerged in the "Culture of Silence" where they lack real consciousness of the world and their own potentials. Only through cultural action for freedom and real command of their own language can they master their own thinking, emancipate their own minds, and transform their reality. Freire describes the "Culture of Silence" in the following words:

> In the culture of silence the masses are 'mute', that is they are prohibited from creatively taking part in the transformations of their society and therefore prohibited from being. . . . Overcome by the myths of this culture, including the myth of their own 'natural inferiority', they do not know that their action upon the world is also transforming. Prevented from having a 'structural perception' of the facts involving them, they do not know that they cannot 'have a voice', that is, that they cannot exercise the right to participate consciously in the socio-historical transformation of their society, because their work does not belong to them (1972:30).

The opposite view on the "Culture of Poverty" is held by for instance Fuglesang and Chandler (1986:24-27) who argue that conscienticization is no prerequisite for poverty alleviation and that the poor are far from apathetic, lethargic or limited in their horizon, as is often stated. Impressed by the success of the Grameen Bank Rural Credit Facilitation Programme in Bangladesh, Fuglesang and Chandler pursue a more economistic line of thought: "The ultimate question is whether a method or approach to community participation is economically sustainable" (*ibid*. p. 25). They can perhaps be said to represent a more optimistic "view of Man" than the one presented above. They argue that the poor have their own culture and that this culture also must be understood as assets, resources and skills that the poor possess. Examples of such assets are: listening skills; memory skills; survival skills; resource utilization skills; and occupation skills.

The argument of this paper is that any human resource development strategy, including literacy promotion, has to take as its point of departure a thorough understanding of both the positive and the negative aspects of the Culture of Poverty as well as an awareness of the inhibiting factors in the Culture of Silence. This is also why literacy promotion, in the long run, never can be sufficient in itself without the human development or awareness-raising component which seeks to remove the barriers of the Culture of Silence.

Any intervention aimed at alleviating poverty would have to make sure that the poor have access to resources, material as well as mental. It would be necessary to provide them with a functional level of education and culture and an awareness of the urgent need for collaboration and mutual support. It would have to develop in them confidence in their ability to bring about positive change in their own lives and in the life of their community. Such a strategy would also have to address the special needs of women and their particular state of powerlessness. Finally, such an approach would have to accommodate the possible resistance on the part of those in control of power and resources and base itself on the realization of the necessity to sensitize those in power to the needs of the poor.

## Conclusion

A number of questions have been raised regarding the benefits of literacy for individuals as well as for nations – both at the Hässelby symposium and elsewhere. Does literacy emancipate the mind? Does it lead to better quality of life? Does it improve health and lead to lower fertility? Does literacy cause higher productivity and promote economic growth? Does literacy lead to political unrest and change? Does literacy support democracy or dictatorship? Etc. The obvious way to begin to answer these questions is to say that it all depends on:

1) How literacy is imparted.
2) Under what conditions it is imparted.
3) How literacy competence is put to use.

The argument in this chapter has been that the degree and type of poverty and oppression have to be determined and identified as the context within which literacy interventions have to be conceived, designed, and implemented, and that choices regarding objectives, strategies, methods, and contents have to be grounded in the particular needs of the target groups under those particular circumstances. A second argument has been that interventions to promote literacy should be seen as components of a strategy to develop resources in human beings to enable them to cope with work and life in general.

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## Chapter Two

# Literacy: A Tool for the Empowerment of Women? Women's Participation in Literacy Programmes of the Third World

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### Introduction

To date, very little research has focused on adult literacy for women and no systematic reviews have been available. It is hoped that this symposium, organized in the context of the United Nations proclamation of the International Literacy Year 1990, as the beginning of a ten year decisive effort to reduce illiteracy in the world, will be a timely contribution to filling this gap.

This paper examines womens' participation in literacy programmes in the third world countries and considers the case for literacy as a tool for the empowerment of women. However, it has not been possible to give a complete summary of all the information accumulated by the growing worldwide experience in this field by both practitioners and local and international organisations; neither has it been possible to fully cover the rich adult literacy experiences under the popular education movements in Latin America.

A review is first made of the widening gender disparities in literacy attainment in different regions against a back-drop of worsening economic constraints and increasingly severe national debt burdens. Both the economic crisis and the remedial "structural adjustment programmes" applied in many third world countries today, have meant significant budget cuts in social sectors like education and health, as well as a deterioration in living standards for large sectors of the population. This, in turn, has implied increased demands on women's work and duties, as well as a lower priority given to literacy at both individual and government levels. At this rate, without strong popular movements encouraging and promoting women's participation in literacy, it is the poor and illiterate women who will be the most consistently afflicted victims. The view held in this paper, is that literacy is one of the first steps in a process of enabling women to take control over their own lives, participate on a more equal basis in society, and eventually free themselves from economic exploitation and patriarchal oppression. In addition to social justice, human rights and equality, there are many other human, social and economic reasons to urge governments and organizations to seriously take special actions to promote literacy education of women and girls; a theme which is the priority objective of the International Literacy Year.

Secondly, this paper gives the background to women's illiteracy, followed by an account of some findings made on the involvement of women in adult literacy and related non-formal education programmes. Selected patterns of women's specific responses to literacy programmes, including specific constraints circumscribing women's full participation and efficient learning, mainly in Africa, are also outlined.

The analysis goes on to show that the attractiveness of literacy programmes as a whole, and for women in particular, depends on the given social, cultural, economic and political contexts. In many instances, especially when women have been left in charge of the households, as best exemplified by the case of large-scale male migration from rural areas, women do express strong wishes and reasons to participate in literacy programmes.

The paper further argues that a process of social change that includes community involvement and mobilization in favour of women's literacy, is needed if participation is to be sustained and male resistance overcome. It also goes on to show that literacy programmes, often integrated with other practical activities, such as income-generating projects, seldom adapt to the real learning conditions of women. Usually, not enough time and attention is given to the literacy component as well as the special provisions for facilitating women's full participation. Consequently, literacy campaign efforts are characterised by irregular attendance, high drop-out rates and weak results. In the examples of successful programmes cited, however, the crucial role and importance of participation and awareness-raising, sensitivity on the part of the organizers and trainers to specific needs, and the use of creative organizational and mobilisational approaches as contributive factors to the success are immediately evident. But most of all, they show that literacy is a potential empowering tool for women.

## Literacy and Gender Disparities

Of the world's approximately one billion illiterate people, 63 per cent is female. In absolute terms, the number of illiterate women is estimated at 561 million (Unesco 1988). In the 25 least developed countries (with a per capita GNP of less than 100 US dollars per year) only one in five women is literate. Despite the obvious limitations in quoting official statistics on literacy data however, the tendency is usually still to underestimate the actual illiteracy rates. Even when one considers the first school cycle alone, the inefficiency and deficiency of the primary school system, with such high drop-out rates implies that a large proportion of the enrolled children in fact, never learn functional literacy.

According to the UNESCO definition, a functionally literate person must be able to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his/her group and community and also for enabling him/her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his/her own community's development (Unesco 1978:18). Although in many Third World countries today girls make up between 40 and 50 per cent of the total enrollments at primary level, more girls than boys do drop out before completing third grade. This is one of several indicators that serves to confirm that underestimation of female illiteracy in particular is likely to be substantial.

Table 2:1 is a summary literacy statistics by major regions and sex (Unesco 1985). The gap between men and women is indicated by the difference between the illiteracy rates. In comparative terms, the table indicates that Latin America and the Caribbean have a more even distribution of illiteracy among men and women than do other regions of the South.

Table 2:1 Number of Illiterates and Illiteracy Rates in Percentage, for the Adult Population (aged 15 and over, 1985)

| | Absolute Number of Illiterates (15 and over) | Illiteracy Rates | | | Female Rate minus Male Rate Points |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Total | Male | Female | |
| World Total | 888.7 | 27.7 | 20.5 | 34.9 | 14.4 |
| Developing Countries | 868.9 | 38.2 | 27.9 | 48.9 | 21.0 |
| Least Developed C. | 120.8 | 67.6 | 56.9 | 78.4 | 21.5 |
| Developed C. | 19.8 | 2.1 | 1.7 | 2.6 | 0.9 |
| Africa | 161.9 | 54.0 | 43.3 | 64.5 | 21.2 |
| Latin America | 43.6 | 17.3 | 15.3 | 19.2 | 3.9 |
| Asia | 665.7 | 36.3 | 25.6 | 47.4 | 21.8 |
| Oceania | 1.6 | 8.9 | 7.6 | 10.2 | 2.6 |

Source: UNESCO 1985.

Comparisons between present and past illiteracy in regard to gender disparities reveal the alarming fact that the proportion of women illiterates is steadily growing. In 1960, 58 per cent of all adult illiterates were women; by 1970 this percentage had risen to 60 per cent and by 1985 it had gone up to 63 per cent (Unesco 1972; 1985).

Another indicator of this widening gap is in the female share of the total increase of illiteracy among the adult population (15 years and above). Between 1960 and 1985, 133 million out of a total increase of 154 million illiterates (86 per cent) were women. In absolute numbers the greatest increase of women's illiteracy was in Asia, with an increase of 109 million in this period. In Africa, the numbers are smaller due to the smaller total population, but the increase rate was largest. The number of illiterate women in Africa rose by 44 per cent (from 68 to 98 million) between 1960 and 1985. The increase among the male illiterate population is significantly smaller. In Latin America the increase in itself was insignificant and the difference between men and women was negligible.

These data are only a few among many statistics which point to the de facto discrimination against women in the field of education. In many countries of Africa and Asia, the illiteracy rate among the female rural population is much higher than the overall country rates. However, in Latin America, which is more urbanized than other regions of the South, poor urban women often constitute the single largest group of illiterates (see for instance Brazil and Argentina).

Meanwhile illiteracy among women and men in the Third World countries is often linked to poverty and oppression. The forms that the patriarchal and economic oppression as well as subordination of illiterate women take, differ according to the history and culture of each region and country. The extent of the socio-political and economic involvement of women has also varied according to the influences from pre-colonial, colonial and the post-colonial conditions, all of which, in combination, account for the specific situation of poor illiterate women today.

Furthermore, the education system introduced and endorsed by the colonial powers was, itself, based on discrimination by gender, class and race. The introduction of European 19th century concepts of education favoured the children of the colonizers and the ruling class. Apart from a very small elite, the bulk of the colonized people were either not provided with formal education or were offered a minimum of religiously oriented elementary schooling. This served the double purpose of equipping the necessary labour force with elementary skills while ensuring, by means of elaborate religious doctrines, docile attitudes among the learners. In this way, the dominant social order is maintained. This is congruent with education theories which assume that the state operates mainly to represent the interests of those who dictate economic power in society. Thus, even if access to education were increased, girls' enrolment would still fall far behind that of boys and the figure for those who would survive the school system would be even less.

Lack of access to school accounts for most adult illiteracy today. This, in turn, has it's basis in the traditional sex division of roles in the family and in the society, that has ensured the exclusion of most girls from acquiring literacy through school. Thus, girls have enrolled in schools whose aim it is, to reinforce their subordination. Interviews made by Judith Marshall (1988:264) with Mozambican women workers in a factory in Maputo, during a study on literacy conducted in 1985 and 1986 illustrate this clearly:

> I didn't study as a child. My father wouldn't let me. I don't know why . . . . In the colonial days, schooling wasn't for women. "Go to school to do what?" That's how it was seen.
>
> (Albertina Carlos, 42 years old)
>
> The girls who were sent to school were made to collect firewood and cultivate the fields. Only the boys were allowed to study. This was in Santa Maria Mission.
>
> (Alcinda Macuacua, 38 years old)

> I went to school up to second class. There was a lot of doctrine and not much math and Portuguese at the Cambine Mission. There was also a lot of work growing maize, peanuts and cassava to buy school materials.
>
> (Clementina Oficio, 45 years old)

Even if such open discrimination practised during colonial days is less common today, patriarchal ideologies and social systems that discriminate against women still do exist. This, in addition to the lack of provisions for girls' and women's full participation in public education, has meant continued gender inequality. Many researchers have, in fact, shown how education systems of today reproduce not only the social class power structure, but also the existing gender differences (Strömquist 1987). Girls' equal access to formal schooling is, however, a right, that must be pursued to full attainment.

On the research front however, the issue of literacy for women in the third world remains an utterly underresearched area. The few studies that exist are often not easily available. Even for the few existing studies, there is no systematic overview available. In most literature dealing with adult literacy, scattered references are made to the specific female literacy situations, but this is rarely treated in an integrated and systematic way. The nearest the field of "women in development" reports have come to dealing with literacy-linked issues is in the context of basic Non-Formal Education (NFE) and integrated "income-generating" projects for women. This paper will therefore make references to sources on both general adult literacy and NFE projects for women.

## Women's Response to Literacy Activities in Different Contexts

In many African countries more women than men, particularly among the rural population, participate in literacy classes. Women represent between 70 and 90 per cent of the enrolled literacy learners in many countries (see for instance Botswana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Zambia). If so many women and so few men participate, then why is the illiteracy rate still higher among women than among men? Most experiences show that the dropout rate is higher and attendance is more irregular among women than men. Studies of literacy programmes have also shown that it takes longer for female than for male learners to become functionally literate due to a number of factors. This is the case in, for example Tanzania, Ethiopia and Mozambique (Johnston 1984; Lind 1988).

Research undertaken by Jennifer Riria (1983) on rural women and literacy in Kenya and other countries shows that women's motivation for literacy is partly linked to changes in the social role of men and women. Women in many Third World countries, especially Africa, are now actively involved in areas that men monopolized before. With the migration of men to towns to take up employment, women have been left in charge of agriculture and general home improvement projects. Consequently women in this situation feel the need for literacy because they see it as an instrument to coping in an understanding way with their responsibilities. It also creates a desire among women to be able to read their husband's letters and to write back without help of other people.

In South Asia, however, it has been shown that women participate less than men in literacy (Dighe 1985). Experiences show that rural women there are less motivated for literacy than men, due to hindrances of poverty, religious and cultural traditions and the social and political milieu, which impose a strict enforcement of the economic and social subjugation of women. Without concomitant social change, literacy does not present a way out of the existing submission of women. As women are certainly aware of this, the common constraints on their participation in literacy, such as lack of time, overwork, male resistance, are not easily overcome. There are successful examples, such as the case of the Self-Employed Women's Association in India, which show that only when literacy has been linked to making women aware of the causes of their oppression, and at the same time, to organizing and training them for successful self-reliance activities, does it become a strongly felt economic need (Fordham 1985; Dighe 1985).

In spite of the many valid reasons for women to participate in literacy classes, the existence of multiple traditional and new roles of women not only prevent them from regular attendance but also hampers their efficient learning. The burdens of domestic responsibility, like the fact of frequent childbirths put enormous demands on time and energy, leaving no room for any extra activities. For literacy class attendance and learning, interruptions are frequent and concentration is lower when mothers attend classes bringing along with them, their smallest children.

Lack of self-confidence and relative isolation from more literate environments are additional factors working against womens' full participation in literacy classes. In Mozambique, literacy learners often expressed their weak confidence in learning by blaming themselves for their learning difficulties, for example "my head is no good for learning" or "I like to study but nothing stays in my head". The fact that these remarks are commonly uttered by both men and women confirms that the lack of self-esteem and self-confidence is attributable to the simultaneous processes of the gender role ideology and as a consequence of the attitudes inculcated by colonialism.

Nonetheless, a large number of men benefitted from having had more contact outside the rural home environment than women. The gender division of labour and roles meant that men had some prior exposure to or experience of written communication. This has been shown to reflect and affect the appreciation of the uses of written language and consequently encourage literacy learning (Gray 1969; ICAE 1979; Downing 1987; Roy & Kapoor 1975). A case study of a few literacy classes in Mozambique found that this was the most important individual background factor behind variations in learning progress, accounting for some of the learning difficulties encountered by many rural women (Lind 1988).

Closely linked to this, is the fact that women have had much less exposure to other languages than their mother tongue. More men than women can communicate in the official language due to patriarchal traditions of men being the "spokesmen" and of women expected to stay silent in public. Mens' mobility as contrasted to women's homebound isolation, and the fact that men, more often than women have been to primary school for some time during their childhood before joining adult literacy, all contribute to the motivation and performance levels in literacy. The language handicap of women is most evident when literacy is taught in a second language, as is often done in many African countries.

In Mozambique the language of instruction was Portuguese, which was much more easily understood among illiterate men than women. Even if the motivation to learn Portuguese, the official national language, was very strong among women, the burden of learning a second language simultaneously with learning to read and write, considerably complicates the process of literacy acquisition. Furthermore, almost all written and printed communication for public use was in a tightly structured Portuguese much too complex in structure, vocabulary and presentation for a neo-literate person. This obviously has a discouraging effect not only on self-confidence but also on prospects for retention.

Research on effects of the national literacy programme in Kenya (Carron *et al*. 1988) further confirms the discouraging fact that women tend to use their newly acquired literacy skills less frequently than men. The difference was particularly strong in the case of newspaper reading. This was partly related to women's generally lower degree of mastering Kiswahili, the language of newspapers and of literacy instruction, and presumably to their relative isolation from the urbanized "literate" parts of the Kenyan society as compared to men. On the other hand, it was found that, in the case of calculation, the differences between the sexes were less pronounced, probably as a consequence of the involvement of all segments of the Kenyan society in the market economy.

Women are moreover discouraged by the attitudes of men, especially the references of the male teacher, to their capacities in the classroom. In homes, husbands and guardians sometimes even completely forbid women to take part in literacy classes.

> Men are afraid that if their women learn more than they themselves did, it may expose their own ignorance (Riria *ibid.*).

One may add, that this would directly challenge their power position within the family. Such challenges to men can lead to violent reactions against women. The issue of fear of husband's or other male family members' violent reactions against women's independent activities, such as literacy, and the extent to which it prevents women from participating in literacy and further training is a crucial and important one; and demands separate attention and research.

Community and teachers' attitudes, as much as teaching methods, are essential to literacy participation and for sustaining motivation, in particular, among women. A superior and patronizing teaching attitude discourages interest, while a democratic, open and involved attitude, treating the learners as equal adults, and creating an atmosphere of confidence, is found to have a positive influence on attendance and results (Laubach 1947; Freire 1972; Sjöström & Sjöström 1983). The role of female teachers for female learners and the question whether separate female learning groups encourage learning and greater participation among women are other issues requiring more study.

## The Role of Political Mobilization and Community Support

The general experience of adult literacy programmes, whether they are organized on a large scale by the state or on a small scale by NGOs, is that without various forms of mobilization or specific action aimed at creating motivation, the response among the learners is weak. Once people have been mobilized, literacy classes often attract a fair number of enrollees. Despite this, however, irregular attendance and high dropout rates are still the main features of these programmes.

> People would indeed like to be literate. However, the strength of their desire and its ability to carry them through to completion are still the uncertain factors (Oxenham 1975:4).

This implies that although the need to explain the relevance of literacy in pre-literacy mobilization campaigns is essential, it is still more important to create a situation where the need for literacy is felt or where the use of literacy becomes evident, or to select areas for literacy where such a situation already exists in order to ensure sustained motivation and participation. The consensus is that the integration of literacy activities into a process of social and political reform or other development-related efforts aiming at solving felt needs, encourages participation and motivation (Lind & Johnston 1986).

Only national mass literacy campaigns have successfully managed to mobilize and teach hundreds of thousands of illiterate women and men elementary literacy skills. Such campaigns have taken place in for example Angola, Cuba, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Tanzania and Vietnam, where literacy was part of a national policy for overcoming poverty and injustice. Both the state and the citizens concerned expected literacy to be one of many factors which would improve social, political and economic conditions and help develop human and material resources. "National commitment" or "political will" expressed through the state and/or a popular movement, incorporating all sectors of the society, and the capacity to organize and mobilize the people and other resources for literacy, were crucial for high levels of participation of both women and men (Lind & Johnston 1986; Unesco 1987). In most campaigns the teaching methods have been traditional, but the contents have been focused on national issues, including themes stressing equal rights and the need for women's emancipation and equal participation in all spheres of society.

Just like in most literacy campaign strategies however, the issue of sustaining of literacy levels acquired during the programme, especially among women, often becomes quite problematic in the post-campaign period. In the first place, it is very difficult to gain access to easy and useful reading material. Even if post-literacy programmes are offered, the psychological and social constraints women face as compared to men especially in the period following the first phase of a literacy campaign when overall enthusiasm is dwindling, implies that less women than men manage to consolidate and apply their acquired literacy skills. In the post-campaign period in particular, the rate at which women gradually get edged out of the path of literacy is quite disturbing. This was evident for instance in the Mozambican case, where female enrolment outnumbered male enrolment in the first campaign rounds. In 1982, the fourth campaign year, the literacy data indicated a fall from 40 per cent female enrolled learners in March, to 29 by the end of October. Finally, the female share fell to 22 per cent among the learners who passed the final national test in mid-November the same year. Male dominance among post-literacy learners was even more clear. In the end, it was they, who managed to get the post-literacy certificate, which, in this case meant an entry ticket to many areas of employment and further training (Lind 1988).

In national mass campaigns, as well as more locally organized literacy campaigns, the degree of female learners' participation in particular, has also depended on community attitudes. In many cases active involvement of local leaders in favour of literacy activities has been crucial for the achievement of high levels of participation and learning (Laubach 1947; Downing 1987; Lind 1988). For example, in 1971, when the first drive of the Tanzanian literacy campaign reached the island of Mafia, the local leaders insisted that men *and* women were to participate. Separate classes for men and women were organized. In spite of feudal and muslim traditions of oppression, the great majority of illiterate women and men enrolled and completed the programme successfully. Mobilizing visits by national leaders was followed up by the appointment of an Area Commissioner, who was himself, a committed adult educator. This was of vital importance for the campaign. In many cases local bosses are indifferent to adult education, not to say hostile towards it. Many of them fear that, with the acquisition of literacy, people in general would become aware of their leaders' shortcomings and start to ask "uncomfortable" questions (Rydström 1973:63). One female learner was asked what her husband thought about her participation in literacy classes.

> Yes, he grumbles a bit like men do. Some men are very worried, and they don't let their wives attend classes. But it is too late, I think. When the Area Commissioner held a meeting here both men *and* women were asked to come. We didn't dare to, in the beginning. But the cell leader had brought his wife, and she came back to fetch us. The Area Commissioner had complained that so few women were present and said that he would not start the meeting until everyone had met up. These classes have meant a lot to us. (*ibid*. p. 59)

When commitment is manifested in the combined efforts of both national and local leaders with authority, as in this case, the effect is very powerful. This was confirmed in a case study of literacy in nine agricultural cooperatives in Mozambique (Marshall 1984). The great majority of the approximately 700 learners were female. The Ministry of Agriculture and the Literacy Services coordinated their actions at all levels to encourage the literacy activities. Important issues, for instance, the time-table, were discussed and determined at regular general meetings among the cooperative members. These discussions were considered essential for the sustained participation and the relatively positive results compared to the rest of the country in the same year (1983). It was concluded that the participants' involvement in organizing the literacy activities and in the decision-making process, as well as the concern shown by both the local community and several ministries at national, provincial and district levels were crucial factors for the relative success, namely, that about 400 rural women completed the literacy course (Marshall 1984).

## Literacy Linked to Other "Development" Activities

Many literacy programmes of today are based on concepts similar to that of "Fundamental Education", promoted by Unesco and other agencies during the period 1946-1964. It was adopted to describe a broad field of development activities, of which non-formal literacy programmes was only one. Myrdal (1968) points out that the concept became merged with the "community development" ideology, which stressed that literacy must be used for something of practical importance in order to produce development. He observed that,

> . . . adult education has been either neglected altogether or turned into something so "practical" that it no longer encompasses any serious attempt to make people literate (Myrdal 1968:1687).

Myrdal exemplifies this neglect of literacy efforts in India, where there was little enthusiasm among the villagers for any aspect of the education programme "other than singing, listening to stories, learning skills in embroidery, and so on" (*ibid*. p. 1688). He does not address the gender issue explicitly, but the reference to embroidery activities is a clear indication that women were involved in such programmes.

Other more selective and economic-oriented literacy programmes of today draw on the work-oriented "Functional" approach, tried out by Unesco in eleven countries from 1967 to 1972 in order to find ways of transforming literacy into an effective instrument for economic development. The meaning of functionality was limited to improved vocational skills and the work-oriented contents of the programmes. A target group, often employed workers, involved in a specific economic activity was selected. UNESCO/UNDP's own critical assessment of the experiment (UNESCO/UNDP 1976) indicated that of all the enrolled literacy students, only about twelve per cent completed the programmes successfully. The approach was indeed not conducive to female participation: "In many cases, literacy was functionalised in economic terms (industry, agriculture, craft orientation), resulting in the virtual exclusion of female participation" (Gilette & Ryan 1983). As is the case of literacy, modern sector employment in the Third World is heavily weighted towards men.

A more common approach today is government promoted General Literacy Programmes with fairly diverse objectives. They are often large-scale, but "politically cool" programmes (Bhola 1983), that provide access to those who want literacy. Examples of such programmes can be found in Botswana, Brazil, India, Kenya, Mexico and Zimbabwe where illiteracy is not seen as an immediate, major obstacle to the economy. Women are often an important target group. The curriculum is usually oriented around subjects which the government authorities feel comfortable with such as health care, nutrition and agriculture.

Studies on such basic Non-Formal Education (NFE) and "income-generating" programmes in which mainly women are involved are unanimous in finding that most of these programmes, which are either run by the state or by traditional NGOs, are focused on mother-child health care, nutrition, food preservation, family planning, home economics (including cooking, sewing, handicrafts, childcare) and small-scale income-generating projects, the majority of which do not seem to be generating much (e.g. Strömquist 1987; Longwe 1988). Hence, the content of these programmes addresses mainly the reproductive role of women. These integrated projects often include a literacy component as well, but it easily gets lost due to all the other time-consuming activities.

The productive role of women has been given less attention. In her review of NFE programmes for women, Strömquist (*ibid.*), points out that technical skill training in agriculture as part of NFE activities continues to benefit men more than women. A scholar from Zambia, analyses this bias towards "welfare" projects in a post-UN Womens's Decade update. She refers to findings confirming that:

> There tends to be a preponderance of projects which, instead of enabling women to take an equal place with men in the control of production and the distribution of benefits, concern themselves with assisting women to carry out their subordinate roles as mothers, domestic workers and processors of food. This focus of interest contradicts the actual economic function of women in Africa, where they - more than men - are the producers of food (Longwe 1988:12).

Longwe advocates an increasing emphasis on women's access, participation and control of economic production and distribution; conscienticization, in particular among welfare-oriented NGOs, on the need for a more radical approach to women's development; and the identification of a strategy for using women's literacy education to raise consciousness to women's issues and women's rights. She suggests that one of the priority issues in the near future should be that of women getting access to credit.

The promotion of income generating projects, among women in particular, is very common today. However, most projects do not generate income, due to underfunding and underqualified staff. The members (mainly female) of the groups initiating projects are not trained in marketing and management skills; they also often lack the technical expertise to produce the intended products, and they do not (or do not know how to) fulfil the conditions for credit; and therefore they hardly ever receive any management support for planning, implementing and developing the projects. An obvious disadvantage for many groups of this kind is precisely that most members are either illiterate or semi-literate.

Nonetheless, initiatives by certain NGOs, such as BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) have been successful in organizing income-generating projects for women (Strömquist 1986). Commitment and sensitivity to needs, as well as skill training combined with awareness-raising, were important factors, in addition to the organization of credit arrangements. The organizational and mobilisational skills gained through active participation in the process were particularly important.

Literacy is seldom brought up as an issue in the context of all these NFE activities. In many state-run, as well as NGO- sponsored programmes, the philosophy is that literacy is not an aim in itself, and therefore literacy should be integrated into other meaningful activities, such as those addressed above. The idea is, in principle, well justified. The need, hence the motivation, for literacy and numeracy skills is reinforced or created through NFE activities related to health care, income-generation, and so on. Literacy and numeracy will become necessary tools for learning more, controlling money and participating in community activities. However, this approach often implies that literacy instruction becomes neglected, since the participating women are expected to be involved in so many activities at the same time. It is upsetting to observe that women organized in many integrated projects neither manage to generate income nor to learn literacy skills (Lind *et al.* 1986).

Prioritisation of literacy has, however, varied from context to context. BRAC in Bangladesh, as well as many women's organizations in India, have concluded that literacy is not a priority. It has been discovered there that women find literacy instruction meaningful only when projects which actually improve their conditions have been going on successfully for some years and have raised awareness of the accompanying need for literacy. In other cases, for example in Latin America, when women have been mobilised and recruited for the purpose of literacy, but the lessons in practice have concentrated more on awareness and/or knowledge transfer about social and political conditions, the participants have felt deceived because they expected to learn to read, write and calculate (Torres 1985).

When long and short-term priority objectives of programmes are not clearly defined, learning efforts and learning problems become difficult to monitor. The results of an experimental project carried out in Andra Pradesh state of India in 1972 is illustrative in this regard. The project, Non-formal Education for Rural Women, contained literacy and mother/child care instruction. Three principal different designs were tested:

Group 1: A training programme with emphasis on reading, writing and arithmetic, with the content derived from child health care issues.

Group 2: A training programme concentrating on practical demonstrations and information on mother and child health issues.

Group 3: A combination of literacy classes and mother/child care demonstrations and instructions.

The results showed that Group 2 showed the greatest progress in the acquisition of knowledge and practices regarding mother and child care; Group 1 alone reached a stage of literacy sufficient to maintain the skills while Group 3 did not gain as much in mother/child care as did Group 2 or as much literacy as did Group 1 (ICAE 1979:42). Observations such as these lead us to ask as to why so many women, after all, make the effort to participate in literacy activities.

## Women's Literacy Motivation

When literacy learners, have been asked about what they expect or want to learn from joining literacy classes, the most common response is very general, often implying only a strong wish to learn reading, writing and calculation. This has been found in several surveys made in Bangladesh (Adult Literacy Motivation 1979), Botswana (Botswana, Ministry of Education 1984), Kenya (Carron *et al*. 1988) and Mozambique (Lind 1988). Other motivations found by Riria (1983) and several other researchers relate to:

1. *The desire to help children to study* is confirmed by studies from Kenya and Mozambique: "For many women, one of the immediate constraints of illiteracy was a sense of inadequacy in mothering. Many stated very explicitly that the main reason for wanting to study was to be able to help their children" (Marshall 1988:272).
2. *More self-reliance and control over personal life*. Recently, literate women on the south coast of Kenya explained the advantages of having learnt to read, write and calculate by referring to their new abilities to sign their names, to travel, control money transactions, read medical prescriptions and instructions, and their resulting feeling of pride and self-reliance. "Our eyes have been opened" was one typical comment (Learners Panel at 4th ITFL meeting, April 1989). Many of the female literacy learners interviewed by Judith Marshall in Mozambique underscored similar views. The wish to learn literacy was clearly related to a yearn for more control over their daily lives in the home and community. One of the learners expressed this motive by saying: "With literacy, people don't earn more but everything they know is in their heads. They can go anywhere, do anything, ask things, enter in. When people don't know how to read and write, they are afraid. A person could arrive somewhere, read a sign saying "Entry prohibited" and know not to enter the area. An illiterate person could wander into a military camp by mistake" (Interview with Cristina Mavale, factory worker in Maputo, in Marshall 1988:270).
3. *Liberation from isolation and absolute submission to received authority*.
4. *The wish to be actors in society in the same way as men*. There are several interesting experiences, particularly in the

> context of social transformation and political mobilization for literacy and equality between women and men, showing the importance for women to come together to discuss common problems through literacy participation. In the case of Mafia in Tanzania, referred to earlier, female learners, when asked if they thought the literacy classes meant liberation for them, replied: "Oh! yes. Before we could hardly go out. As a young girl I was restricted to my home during several years. As married I had to wear my veil when I went out and that was really not often. Now we have been let free. I am starting to get friends. We are learning to read and write. It is fine. But we also get together and talk. That is still better" (Rydström 1973:59).

Observations from Mozambique further indicate that women's participation in literacy frequently gives rise to new situations conducive to struggles around women's liberation:

a) the women integrate into a new reference and support group, itself often supported directly by powerful social forces;

b) in the literacy class situation, the woman is placed in a situation of (near) equivalence with other members of the local society;

c) the woman is in fact not available to perform certain domestic tasks while she is attending the literacy class, which consequently bounces the responsibility to other family members, sometimes the male;

d) she becomes able to manage new skills, which give her a new (potential) role in the family;

e) the mastering of new skills may also give her greater opportunity for paid employment, leading to relative economic liberation. Where new skills enable her to produce an increased surplus from her agricultural labour, however, this may not lead to any change in her economic status, if her husband controls its use or distribution. This may lead to tensions in the family; and,

f) the acquisition of new skills, which may manifest itself in new habits of dress, wider and more open social contacts, greater desire and ability to participate in political discussions and programmes, (as well as) a general democratization of society may follow (Johnston 1984:9-10).

Preliminary findings from a questionnaire sent out in September 1988, by World YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) to all of its member associations confirm such liberating effects of literacy. The responses show the following:

a) women who received literacy training are more respected in the community and at home;
b) they have better skills in their search for jobs and can therefore earn higher salaries;
c) they realize that some jobs which are traditionally considered to be for men only are for them too;
d) they have better capacity to run small businesses and keep records on their own;
e) they are strengthened in leadership roles in women's groups;
f) their political awareness, participation, and organizational skills are enhanced;
g) they gain better understanding of their rights; and
h) they are in a much better position to help their children with their school work (YWCA 1989).

## Concluding Comments

We have shown that the social and political context determines how and when literacy programmes are relevant for women. Examples from Africa have been provided, which indicate that illiterate women often want to become literate, but that relatively few manage to satisfy this wish. The constraints are often overwhelming, such as time-consuming duties, shortcomings in the design of the literacy programmes offered, and mens' resistance.

Mass literacy campaigns, political mobilization and community support for literacy have been most successful in motivating women to participate and complete literacy programmes. Men have, in these campaigns been pressurized to accept women's participation in literacy and in other social, economic and political activities.

Although activities which create prospects for improved living conditions, such as income-generating projects and primary health care instruction combined with awareness-raising discussions on women's rights, are necessary for the empowerment of women, it seems to be a mistake to involve the same women in too many activities at the same time, due to time constraints and problems of learning efficiency.

Projects involving women probably have a better chance to function efficiently if they include a number of women with enough education to be able to cope with training in leadership, organization, management, planning, bookkeeping and marketing. This should not exclude the participation of illiterate women.

Recognizing that their time is constrained, they ought to have a choice of either participating fully in project activities or in literacy classes until they have attained literacy and numeracy skills. A rotation scheme, where some members of the groups are on "study leave" for participating in different stages of literacy or other kinds of training, would perhaps help to overcome the frequent problems of not generating income, literacy or any other tangible results.

A process of conscienticization is also important to promote within the framework of both the project activities and the different training programmes, as is to be found in the Popular Education approach.

Other special provisions and programme designs geared towards meeting women's particular situation and needs are required, for example child-care services during class time and intensive periods of instruction. An interesting approach in this respect has been carried out in Burkina Faso. The Ministry of Rural Affairs launched an intensive literacy campaign among key women in rural areas. Over 13,000 women were recruited among officials and members of female groups, cooperatives, executive boards of female revolutionary committees as well as village midwives. Ten national languages were used for teaching literacy in 470 centres. The adopted training system implied literacy instruction at boarding centres during four phases of twelve days each, spaced out with weekly breaks during which participants could return home to their families. According to the account given of the campaign (Unesco, BREDA 1988), it was successfully carried out in spite of problems created by "possessive husbands, negative influences exerted by adversaries of female emancipation as well as the exhausting demands of being a wife and a mother". More than 40 per cent of the learners were, in fact, nursing mothers. It was hence necessary to resort to the services of accompanying persons to look after the children brought to the centres by a large number of the participants. This created one of the reported problems: food rations were often insufficient to cater for all. The level of literacy learning was considered "good and even excellent in some centres" considering the short time-span and that most learners were initially completely illiterate.

The most innovative value of this experience seems to be the organizational approach that makes it possible for women to concentrate on learning literacy skills during an interval of intensive periods in boarding centres, away from competing demands and duties. Similarly intensive literacy courses of three months for women were also organized in Mozambique by the national womens' organization during the first years of independence. Some of the problems encountered related to poorly qualified tutors, shortages of food supply and not enough time for learning functional literacy skills.

In spite of well-justified warnings of reproducing women's subordination through purely traditional welfare approaches of basic non-formal education for women as a detriment to empowering or emancipating approaches, the importance of teaching women survival skills related to literacy, as well as health and nutrition must not be underestimated. Such training provides necessary tools for further empowering activities of awareness-raising and participation, as well as struggles for equality and social justice. Literacy is a necessary tool in this process, even if it does not solve fundamental development problems.

The need to focus future literacy studies on women's particular needs and constraints is obvious. Strong promotion of action research combined with training of researchers, trainers and instructors is recommended, as well as systematic reviews of available reports and research on female learners' specific situation.

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## Chapter Three

# Women's Literacy for Development

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### A Brief Overview of the Situation Today

Despite so many years of effort and no shortage of declarations, the extent of female illiteracy will remain one of the greatest problems of the world at the end of this century. According to Unesco estimates, there were still 889 million illiterate adults in 1985 of which 561 million were women. Nearly half the women of developing countries do not know how to read and write. Although we cannot be quite certain of the real impact of literacy programmes, nor of the extent to which they achieve the very ambitious objectives that are often set for them, it has become obvious that no long-term process of development will take place unless the population, and women in particular, are able to read, write, calculate and understand their environment better.

We shall first present some statistics on the state of illiteracy of women around the world; then discuss the contribution of women's education and literacy to development and finally draw some conclusions for further action.

### The Extent of Female Illiteracy in the World

It is well known that reliable international statistics and comparisons in the field of illiteracy are difficult to come by, partly because the most common sources of information are demographic censuses and also because the definitions used can be very different from country to country. When completing the questionnaire, people are often asked whether they know how to read and write, without being tested. There is thus a danger of overestimating the literacy level.

Another source of overestimation is the fact that anybody who has been to primary school is generally considered literate, yet this can be doubtful in certain cases. In certain contexts, on the other hand, the level of literacy can be underestimated as the census is only taken into account for specific scripts. In West Africa, for example, many people are considered illiterate in the Latin script when they may actually know how to read and write in Arabic. On the whole, however, the statistics and estimates given below which are extracted from the recent Unesco publication "Compendium of Statistics on Illiteracy", Unesco 1988, run more risk of underestimating female illiteracy than overestimating it.

Leaving aside developed countries, the female illiteracy rate in 1985 ranges from 19.2 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean to 47.4 per cent in Asia and 64.5 per cent in Africa. The regional averages hide wide disparities between subregions and countries. As Table 3:1 shows, in one country in Asia (Yemen) more than 95 per cent of women are illiterate; three countries in Asia and ten countries in Africa have a women's illiteracy rate of between 80 and 95 per cent. In 43 countries more than 50 per cent of adult women are illiterate (31 in Africa, 2 in Latin America, and 10 in Asia and Oceania). The number of countries with a women's illiteracy rate below 20 per cent is still small: most of them in Europe and Latin America.

If the highest illiteracy rates for women are found in Africa (in western Africa in particular: 72.8 per cent on average) and in the Arab States, it is Asia that has the highest number of women illiterates. Five Asian countries have 65 per cent of the world's women illiterates and two countries alone (China and India) have more than 50 per cent of them. Everywhere, with the exception of

Lesotho, Jamaica and a few other Caribbean countries, the illiteracy rate of women is much higher than that of men.

The difference in illiteracy rates between men and women is relatively small in Latin America but it can be quite large elsewhere. A large number of African, Arab and Middle South Asian countries and some East Asian countries (China, for example) have more than twenty points difference between their male and female illiteracy rates. Some countries like Afghanistan, Chad, Libya, Mozambique, Zaire and the two Yemens show a 30-point difference between these two rates.

It is frequently the case that there is a wide illiteracy gap in countries which have high illiteracy rates for both sexes, but the difference can also be large in countries which have succeeded in reducing their overall literacy rates significantly. This is the case of China, Hong Kong, Burma and Malaysia in Asia; Syria, Libya and Jordan among Arab countries; and Ghana and Kenya in Africa, to give a few examples. Even in Latin America, an illiteracy gap of some 10 points between men and women can be observed both in countries which have relatively high illiteracy rates (like Bolivia and Guatemala) or in Peru, which has a lower one.

Table 3:1 Distribution by Region, of Female Illiteracy (1985)

| Illiteracy Rates (per cent) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Region | >90 | >80 <95 | >50 <80 | >30 <50 | <20 |
| Africa | - | 10 | 21 | 8 | 1 |
| Latin America & the Caribbean | - | - | 2 | 7 | 10 |
| Asia | 1 | 3 | 5 | 15 | 0 |
| Oceania | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| Europe | - | - | - | 1 | 5 |

Table 3:2 Countries with the Highest Number of Female Illiterates (aged 15+ in 1985)

| Countries | No. of Women Illiterates (mil.) | Proportion of World Total | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | per cent | cum. per cent |
| China | 162 | 28.9 | 28.9 |
| India | 160 | 28.5 | 57.4 |
| Pakistan | 22 | 3.9 | 61.3 |
| Bangladesh | 21 | 3.7 | 65.0 |
| Indonesia | 18 | 3.2 | 68.2 |
| Nigeria | 16 | 2.9 | 71.1 |
| Brazil | 9 | 1.6 | 72.7 |
| Egypt | 6 | 1.0 | 73.7 |
| Iran | 5 | 0.9 | 74.6 |
| Sub-Total | 419 | 74.6 | |
| World Total | 561 | 100 | |

*Source*: UNESCO Statistical Reports, 1988.

Illiteracy rates everywhere are higher in rural areas than they are in the towns. Thus, the highest illiteracy rates are generally to be found among rural women. No extensive recent figures are available but it is worth noting that the female illiteracy rate has been shown to be as high as 98 per cent in the rural areas of Burkina Faso (1978), Morocco (1971) and Afghanistan (1979), 93 per cent in Pakistan (1981) and 83 per cent in India (1981).

## To What Extent Has the Situation Changed Over Recent Years?

The last few decades have been marked by a definite improvement in the literacy situation of women and illiteracy rates have decreased in most countries. Weighted averages by region show that female illiteracy rates decreased quite sharply between 1970 and 1985 in Africa and in Latin America, and somewhat more slowly in Asia. The number of countries where more than 80 per cent of women remain illiterate has decreased significantly while the number of countries where fewer than 20 per cent of women are illiterate has increased. The decline in the illiteracy rates has been quite substantial in countries like Algeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Malaysia, Mexico Tanzania, Thailand and Tunisia, to name but a few. These major strides are reflected in falling illiteracy rates for younger women: a significantly higher proportion of 10 to 24 year-old women are literate compared to those aged 35 years or over. Such achievements are not true everywhere and in a fairly large number of countries the situation is only improving slowly. Quite recently illiteracy rates have even increased in a couple of African countries, for instance Benin and Rwanda, reflecting the recent decline in enrolment ratios and total enrolment, as a result of the deterioration of the economic environment.

This situation appears even more gloomy if one looks at the evolution of the absolute number of illiterates. The total number of women illiterates increased between 1970 and 1985. This rise was quite significant in Asia, from 320 million women illiterate in 1970 to 427.2 million in 1985 and in Africa, where the figure grew from 82.6 million to 98.1 million. The only region where the number of women illiterates has decreased is Latin America, yet the figure still increased in three countries of the region including Brazil, which has the highest population and the highest number of illiterates of the area. In fact, if we consider the five countries which represent nearly 70 per cent of all illiterate women in the world (see Table 3:1), all but Indonesia have shown an increase in the absolute number of women illiterates between 1971 and 1985. This increase in the number of illiterates is not restricted to women but the number of female illiterates does increase faster than that of their male counterparts. In India and Pakistan, for example, the number of male illiterates increased at a rate of 1.2 per cent per annum between 1971 and 1981, but the number of women illiterates increased at a rate of 1.6 per cent in India and 2.0 per cent per annum in Pakistan during the same period.

The reason for this increase in the absolute number of illiterates while the illiteracy rates diminish, is obviously linked to high population growth. Between 1970 and 1980, the population grew at an average rate of 2.9 per cent in Africa and Arab States, 2.5 per cent in Latin America and 2.1 per cent in Asia. But population growth is not the only reason. Other explanations are to be found in the small size of literacy programmes and in the insufficient coverage of the educational system.

## Insufficient Size of Literacy Programmes

With the exception of a few countries like China, Cuba, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Tanzania or Viet Nam which have embarked on large literacy campaigns and mobilized large numbers of people for the purpose, the size of most literacy programmes is quite small compared to the number of people who need to benefit from them. According to the survey on literacy programmes carried out by the Unesco Regional Office for Africa in 1983-1984, the number of people enrolled in such programmes rarely represents more than four per cent of the total number of illiterates (except in the case of Ethiopia and Tanzania) (Breda 1986). In countries like Burkina Faso or Niger this number of people enrolled represents even less than one per cent of the total illiterate population. Enrolment can vary a great deal from year to year but this does not really alter the extent of the problem. If instead of comparing the total number of illiterates to the total number of participants one compares the number of learners who graduate, the picture becomes even more dramatic. Here again one has to be very careful since the method of assessment can vary between countries: some organize national literacy tests, others leave it up to the teachers to decide who has achieved literacy and numeracy, while others give preference to self evaluation or peer assessment. In any case, the percentage of learners who qualify is relatively low compared to the total number of participants enrolled. In Africa completion rates range from a low 6 to 15 per cent in Swaziland and Niger; 24 per cent in Tanzania; and to a high of 55 to 60 per cent in Burkina Faso and Congo (Breda 1986). In Brazil an average of 35 per cent of those who participated in the literacy programme became literate between 1974 and 1981. On the whole given the difficulty of mobilizing adults for long periods of time and retaining them in courses several nights a week, a 40 per cent retention or completion rate is generally considered a fairly satisfactory one. With these figures in mind, it becomes obvious that it will take a long time for illiteracy to be eradicated. Even if women represent the majority of participants in literacy programmes, which is the case in most Latin American countries and a good number of African countries, it will take years for them to become literate.

Table 3:3 Number of Countries According to the Extent of Female Illiteracy Distribution (in per cent)

| | 1970 | 1985 |
|---|---|---|
| >95 | 20 | 1 |
| >80 - <95 | 23 | 13 |
| >50 - <80 | 17 | 29 |
| >20 - <50 | 24 | 26 |
| <20 | 17 | 25 |
| **Total** | 101 | 94 |

## Insufficient Coverage of the Educational System

It is not surprising to find that countries which have the highest rate of women's illiteracy have also very low enrolment rates for girls in primary education. On the other hand, countries which have recently succeeded in reducing their female illiteracy rates significantly are those which have often succeeded in achieving universal primary education. This is the case, for example, of Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia in Asia; Kenya, Cameroon, Angola and Zimbabwe in Africa.

In spite of the efforts to increase the coverage of educational systems in developing countries, much remains to be done to improve access of girls to primary schooling. Nowadays, many countries still have very low enrolment ratios – for boys and girls – in primary education. In 1986, 23 countries had still gross enrolment ratios below 70 per cent, most of them in western Sub-Saharan Africa (16) but also in Asia (4) and in Arab States (3). In most of those countries, girls are still largely under-represented in primary enrolment. As a result, average female enrolment ratios in primary education are still low. In 1986 they were estimated at 66.8 per cent in Africa (85.1 per cent for boys) 72.5 per cent in Arab States (94.4 per cent for boys) and 94.3 per cent in Asia (113.8 per cent for boys) (Unesco 1988). Low income semi-arid countries in Africa had only the equivalent of 19 per cent of their female school-age population enrolled in primary schools in 1983. This percentage only goes up to 61 per cent for other low-income African countries.

Under-representation of girls in primary education is, however, not restricted to countries which have very low enrolment ratios nor to individual regions or sub-regions. If one leaves aside European, Latin American and Caribbean countries and a handful of other countries like Gabon in Africa, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Korea in Asia, and Jordan and Kuwait among the Arab States, enrolment ratios in primary education are everywhere lower for girls than for boys. The difference is obviously more marked in certain regions and in certain cultures than in others. Within countries, there are differences between urban and rural areas and between various social, cultural and religious groups. The reasons for this discrimination are well known and have to do with the status of women and the cultural values in different societies.

For what interests us, it is important to note that many women in the world do not yet have access to primary education; certainly not to the same extent as boys and men do. Knowing that a large number of girls enrolled actually drop out before they reach the fourth or fifth grade, that is to say, before they have actually mastered literacy, means that the problem of women's illiteracy will remain with us for a long time. But why is it so essential that women should be made literate?

## Women's Literacy and Development

The need to educate women comes from the recognition of their crucial role in society: women give birth to children and play a major role in the implementation of any family planning programme; they bear the main responsibility for the nutrition and health of their families and of children in particular; they play the predominant part as educators for the following generation; last but not least, in the poorest strata of society whether rural or urban, women perform economic functions which are increasingly crucial for their families' survival. They have always been responsible for carrying out certain tasks in rural areas like growing food crops and marketing produce. In certain countries, the modernization process has led to an increase in their economic responsibilities but not on their status. In certain parts of Africa, for example, the mechanization of agriculture had led to an increase of the area that women have to cultivate by hand. At the same time, children have become less available as additional labour because of the expansion of education. The migration of men in search of work has also increased women's role in agriculture in certain areas. Thus, the number of women heads of household has increased significantly, particularly in eastern and southern Africa. In the urban areas, women also play an important role in the informal sector, in various services and commercial activities.

Numerous studies have shown the impact of education on development whether it is social or economic development. Education, for example, contributes significantly to the reduction of women's fertility level. When one realizes how much of the progress made in various areas has been cancelled out by demographic growth, the reduction of fertility is no small contribution to development. Cochrane (1979) found a tendency for women with more schooling to have fewer children. A recent survey in 14 countries (UN 1982) shows that women with no education have more children than women with secondary, or more, education. The threshold however, that is to say the educational level after which fertility starts declining, varies. In eight countries, fertility starts declining when women have some years of primary schooling. In the six other countries, more education, which implies completed primary or in some cases, the secondary cycle, is required. Maternal education plays also a major role in determining the level of infant and child mortality, as Caldwell (1979) showed in Nigeria, and influences the educational achievement of children. It was shown in Nepal that the literacy level has a positive impact on school enrolment and pupil retention (Kasaju & Manandhar 1985). In Mexico, Munoz Izquierdo (1985) found that adults who completed their literacy courses had daughters with higher education level than those who did not complete their courses. This may mean that the education of children serves as an incentive for adults to participate and complete literacy courses, but it means also that literate mothers have higher educational expectation for their children.

As far as the impact of education on economic development is concerned, for many years it was taken for granted that literacy and education could miraculously provide upward mobility for individuals and boost economic growth for a nation. Indeed, it was easy to see that there is a strong correlation between the level of educational attainment of populations and the economic wealth of different countries. This belief led to some disappointment, however, as a number of countries significantly developed their educational system without succeeding in taking off economically. It was then argued that gains in literacy and schooling follow rather than precede economic growth, and that changes in economic structures should take place before educational investment can yield significant economic benefits. This could seem a traditional chicken and egg problem, if it did not have important implications for planners and policy-makers. Can countries expect significant economic returns from investing on women's literacy, apart from the benefits mentioned above?

Numerous studies have also shown that education increases the productivity of workers in the modern sector of the economy. There is increasing evidence as well that education can raise the productivity of self-employed workers in the urban informal sector. As far as rural areas are concerned, a study summarizing the effects of education on agricultural productivity in different countries concluded that four years of primary education - a commonly considered as the minimum level for retaining literacy - increased farmers' productivity on the average by 7.4 per cent across countries and that the effects of education were much more likely to be positive in modernizing agricultural environments than in traditional ones (Jamison & Lau 1980). This means in fact that, if education is a necessary condition for development, it is not a sufficient one. Mosher (1978) distinguishes what he calls essential factors for agricultural development - which include adequate price incentives for agricultural products, marketing facilities, appropriate supply of seeds, fertilizers, extension services, and so on, - from accelerating factors which include education. Essential factors provide farmers with the motivation to produce. No one, however educated he or she is, would produce if a minimum of conditions and incentives does not exist (an educated farmer would rather leave and try his/her luck elsewhere in an urban setting). When there are incentives to produce, however, education does provide the farmers with the necessary knowledge and attitudes to produce more.

These research results relate more to formal education than to literacy *per se*. There are numerous indications that the literacy and numeracy of adults make any subsequent training, in agriculture or in handicraft a great deal easier, and more efficient (it is easier to explain certain things; it is possible to leave material behind, and so on), but very few research results are available that show the impact of literacy programmes at the individual level and how the fact of becoming literate has affected the lives of participants in terms of income, health, nutrition and, on the aggregate level on economic and social development. The few studies available seem to indicate that literacy programmes can play a definite role in promoting development but that they are much more likely to be effective in urban areas, or in certain rural areas. As in the case above, it is a question of incentives. Adults, both women and men, have to be motivated to learn. This is more likely if they see that it can lead to an improvement of their situation.

Fuller, Edwards & Gorman (1987) analyzing to what extent rising levels of literacy explained the economic growth of Mexico between 1880 and 1940, concluded that literacy did play a significant role in boosting growth during the early period of commercial expansion but that this effect mainly occurred within urban centres of manufacture and trade:

> Despite a sharp analysis by the post-revolutionary government on developing the hinterlands, the impact of literacy in rural agrarian growth was slight at best (*ibid*. p. 338).

Munoz Izquierdo (1985) analyzing the determinants of retention in the current literacy programme, again in Mexico, found that the learners who followed the programme until the end were generally adults who, one way or another, had been in contact with different elements of modernization. In rural areas these were young adults who had a chance from their very early childhood to listen to the radio and the television, and had started their working life as wage earners; in urban areas persistent learners were more likely than others to buy a magazine on a regular basis, to have certain basic services in their homes; they were also more likely to speak a foreign language. In both urban and rural areas, what motivated learners was to be able to read and write, irrespective of whether or not it would help them to solve certain economic problems.

Other studies in Latin America have shown that what motivates learners is the possibility for them to acquire a minimum of literacy and communication skills necessary to get around in an increasingly complex and literate society. Various evaluation studies of Mobral (quoted in Caillods & Carron 1985) have similarly emphasized the lack of interest for literacy courses in the backward rural areas of north-eastern Brazil, compared to urban areas; nonetheless literacy is an important symbol of status and it is sometimes perceived as a necessary passport for migration.

Analysing the effects of the literacy programme on the knowledge and skills acquired by learners in Kenya, Carron, Mwiria and Righa (publication forthcoming) found results which in a different context point to the same direction. Their study shows that the majority of learners, 70 per cent of which were women, joined the literacy programme because they merely wanted to learn how to read, write and do some simple calculation. More than half of them had already had some exposure to education, having attended a few years of primary education. Their main objective was to master the basic communication skill which will "allow them to become part of the mainstream of the society". The authors conclude that the literacy programme does have a positive effect on the functional knowledge, attitudes and practices of the learners: the adults who completed the programme tend to know more about agriculture, health and family planning than illiterates; they also have more positive attitudes towards innovation. Differences in results demonstrate, however, the major influence of contextual factors, which determine both the level of motivation of participants and the quality of their teaching and learning process.

These examples show that by enabling adults, particularly the women, to acquire new information, knowledge and skills, through the introduction of written communication, and by increasing learners' self confidence and raising their status, by facilitating the work and reinforcing the impact of other training programmes, be it in the area of agriculture extension work, health, education or craftsmanship, literacy programs can play an important role in promoting economic development and social well-being. The programmes have, however, many more chances of being successful if they are organised in urban areas or at least in rural areas which undergo a certain process of change and modernization.

## Conclusions

A few tentative conclusions could be drawn from this very limited number of observations:

1. Given womens' key role in society, it is essential that education should be given to them.
2. The only way of radically reducing women's (and men's) illiteracy is by promoting good quality primary education for everybody. In principle, literacy campaigns can achieve similar results but their long lasting effect on learners' knowledge and behaviour are still to be checked. In any case, the problem of illiteracy will remain as long as the educational system, or the absence of it, continues to produce illiterates every year.
3. Insisting on the importance of generalizing primary education does not imply that literacy programmes for adults should be neglected. Many results can be achieved with such programmes, provided one understands the learners' (in our case women's) motivation, the external conditions that influence these motivations, and their ability to learn so that the programmes are adapted accordingly. This implies a great deal of flexibility in the implementation of the programmes as motivations can vary from one place to another.
4. Being sometimes more based on what the organizers perceive as being the need of the population rather than on the motivation of learners, many literacy programmes appear extremely ambitious, trying to achieve (too) many goals at the same time. Many programmes are expected, for example:
   - to teach their participants basic literacy and numeracy;

- to provide them with knowledge and skills in nutrition, health, agriculture, handicraft and so on, in order to change their attitude and encourage economic initiatives and innovations;
- to increase learners ability to participate in social and political life and contribute to the process of nation building; and
- and to raise the learners' self consciousness and self confidence in order to reduce their level of exploitation, oppression and dependence.

Literacy programmes are in fact expected to solve the problems of poverty, dependence and deprivation. One should recognize that this ambition appears quite out of proportion with the resources both human and financial which are normally devoted to the programmes. It is not surprising, then, that literacy programmes have created expectations that they were not able to fulfil. The suggestion then would be to be more modest on the objectives but ambitious on the means. If the relationship between literacy and development is of an interactive nature, each one supporting and nurturing the other, it might be more appropriate to concentrate literacy activities in areas where they are more likely to be efficient than is to say in areas where some sort of a development or modernization process is already taking place (urban areas and selected rural areas).

5. It would also be advisable to link literacy programmes for both women and men as much as possible with other on-going activities such as development projects, extension services, health education and family planning programmes. Both programmes and activities would benefit from this linkage. If many traditional literacy programmes as well as health education and family planning activities are attended by women, this is not the case of many extension service

activities or programmes for workers in the informal sector which are, more often than not, restricted to men. It is not by changing the content of women's literacy programmes only but by allowing women to participate in a variety of other, higher-status, programmes that one will allow their situation to change.

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## Chapter Four

# Women and the Tradition of Reading Around 1700:

## Examples from Sweden and Germany

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### Introduction

For a deeper understanding of the history of reading and writing, an analysis of women's contribution is extremely important. This concerns, to a large degree, the Swedish case, where proficiency in both reading and writing need to be studied separately over their evolution. Within the old reading tradition of the Swedish State Lutheran Church, considering the generations' differences being equalized, a common high proficiency level for both men and women can be seen to emerge ("mass literacy"). On the other hand, the art of writing has shown, over a long period of time, large differences between rural and urban settings, as well as between different social, economic and occupational group ("selective literacy").[1]

A good way to note the significance within this double pattern is thus to consider the case of women and their profile within the available historical material. In doing so, we can begin with the case of Kerstin in the village of Björken, Leksand, Dalarna.

### *Kerstin Ersdotter from Björken, Leksand, Dalarna*

> *Anno 1706. Dominica X. post Trinitatis* *[29/7 1706]*
>
> "Cherstin Ersdotter from Björken. Born 1617 in Simtuna parish and Tiisby. Renata ex bene educatu. (Baptized, obtained a good upbringing.) Resided most in Näsbyggelandet and taught youth to read; this she did within the parish for 58 years. In Stockholm she served well in the households of several noble persons, and was coupled with a low level officer of the Major's company, Olof Jonsson, a man with a strong standing, who promised to wed, seven years previous in Stockholm when he bestowed upon her the promise of matrimony. God blessed the marriage with four children, two sons and two daughters. One daughter survives. Cherstin lived well with her husband for eight years, before he went to Finland where he died after one year. The marriage lasted nine years. She has been a widow for fifty years and has led her life as one would expect of a Christian. The illness was old age. She became very weak; her relatives asked in the evening if she needed care; she answered, 'No, I know, if either I live or die, I belong to the Lord'. Not long after she was relieved. Age 89."[2]

The above text was read from the pulpit in Leksand's Church on a summer day in 1706. Kerstin Ersdotter, born and baptized 1617, engaged in Stockholm 1640, married in Leksand 1647, widowed in 1656, taught children in the village since 1648, died in 1706, at the age of 89. According the to church examination register (*Husförhörslängd*) from 1672 to 1689, Kerstin and her family's knowledge ratings appeared as follows (see Figure 4:1).[3]

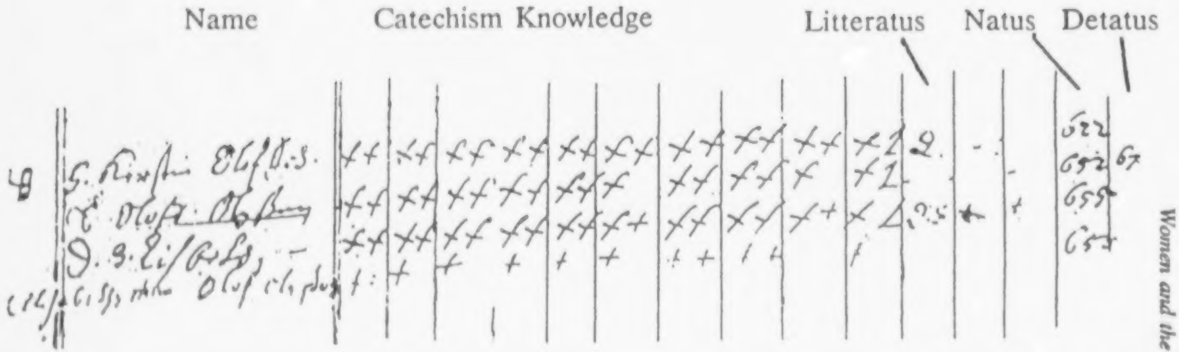
Name
Catechism Knowledge
Litteratus
Natus
Detatus

Figure 4:1 Leksand. Church Examination Register AI:1, 1672-89. Page 15. Kerstin Ersdotter with family.

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The wife, Kerstin (Olof Jonsson's widow) has marks for knowledge in all the columns, one "L" and one "Q" for *Questiones* (questions). It is stated here that she was born (*natus*) in 1622. Her son, Olof Olofsson, born 1652, died (*denatus*) 1674. Daughter, Mrs. Lisbeth, born 1655, married to Olof Olsson, born 1653. The women, here, appear to be clearly more knowledgeable than the men. Both are book learned "L" and have marks on the long catechism-development "Q" *Questiones*. Furthermore, Lisbeth has an additional catechism mark. Of the two men, only the son, Olof, is marked as being *Litteratus*, "L". The women are superior within this family picture. The mother and daughter show a feminine line in this tradition.

## Women and the Evolution of the Reading Tradition

How typical is this family, and how typical are these women? A table for all those within the village of Björken and twenty other villages north towards Siljan and up to the border of the parish of Rättvik, give a representative picture of this (see Table 4:1).

As a whole, there were more women than men in the population, 949 women to 785 men, mainly as a consequence of times of war and instability. Kerstin's husband (an officer in the military) disappeared in Finland. The men were noted to be earlier than the women in reading proficiency (*Litteratus* "L"). This lends to the notion that reading was first more related to profession ("selective literacy"). But those women born after the middle of the century soon caught up with the men. In the next generation, women became the leaders in the reading tradition in many ways. Actually, this is quite typical and has been confirmed through many other examples in the literature.[4]

Kerstin was thus one of those few women, born early in the century, who received the reading mark "L". The son, Olof, and the daughter, Lisbeth, both born in the late 1650s, were also part of those who were literate. But this wasn't the case for Lisbeth's husband, Olof. He was among that fifth of the 1650s' men who received no reading marks.

Table 4:1 Leksand. Church Examination Register AI:1, 1672-89. Notes on *Litteratus*, "L". Date of Birth and Gender. Twenty Villages. N=1734.

| Date of Birth | Men | "L" | Women | "L" |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| -1600 | 15 | 12 | 18 | 0 |
| 1600-09 | 21 | 24 | 27 | 4 |
| 1610-19 | 42 | 30 | 63 | 5 |
| 1620-29 | 69 | 40 | 84 | 10 |
| 1630-39 | 73 | 55 | 101 | 11 |
| 1640-49 | 115 | 45 | 129 | 31 |
| 1650-59 | 139 | 80 | 162 | 58 |
| 1660-69 | 97 | 84 | 103 | 78 |
| without date | 211 | 68 | 260 | 64 |
| Total | 785 | 59 | 949 | 43 |

Notwithstanding, Kerstin was a remarkable woman in her time. She had served in the capital city when she was young, and began to teach children in Leksand shortly after her arrival there as a soldier's wife in the 1640s. A school for children was founded in 1672, which perhaps could have influenced the youngest. Many of these are listed without a date of birth and are placed in the last line of the table. But, the increase in reading marks began, as one can see, long before the school's time, due to the assistance of Kerstin and other teaching women, who are indicated as "teacher of others" in the personal records (*personaliebok*). They would assist the parents in their task of supervising and instructing. The teaching of children, their own and others, was thus a part of the women's role.

This impression of families in Leksand stands true even with a comparison of fifteen bordering villages in the neighboring parish of Rättvik (Table 4:2).[5]

Table 4:2 Rättvik. Church Examination Register AI:1, 1670-90. Notes on Book Reading, "BL". Date of Birth and Gender. Fifteen Villages. N = 981.

| Date of Birth | Men | "BL" | Women | "BL" |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| -1609 | 23 | 32 | 33 | 3 |
| 1610-19 | 20 | 15 | 34 | 6 |
| 1620-29 | 33 | 42 | 51 | 10 |
| 1630-39 | 53 | 37 | 49 | 12 |
| 1640-49 | 59 | 56 | 81 | 35 |
| 1650-59 | 96 | 82 | 105 | 64 |
| 1660-69 | 88 | 90 | 80 | 76 |
| 1670-79 | 98 | 90 | 76 | 85 |
| Total | 466 | 69 | 515 | 46 |

This group consisted of a total of 466 men and 515 women. The differences in book reading ("BL") between men and women were clear, but diminished by the end of the same century. In Rättvik, the introduction of a school for children was delayed, but an older unmarried secondary student wandered throughout the villages and helped the parents with teaching. This was mentioned in a bishop's inspection in 1683. Then, the parish received praise for its widespread reading proficiency, and the bishop left some Catechisms and Hymn booklets to share with the poor or to sell to those who had the means to buy them.[6]

Thus, as illustrated here, the women catch up with the men as portrayed in the reading marks ("BL"). The women were involved in teaching. This is also valid when we look at the various columns found in the church examination register. An example is included here, which is taken from Rättvik's church examination register from around 1670-90 (Figure 4:2).

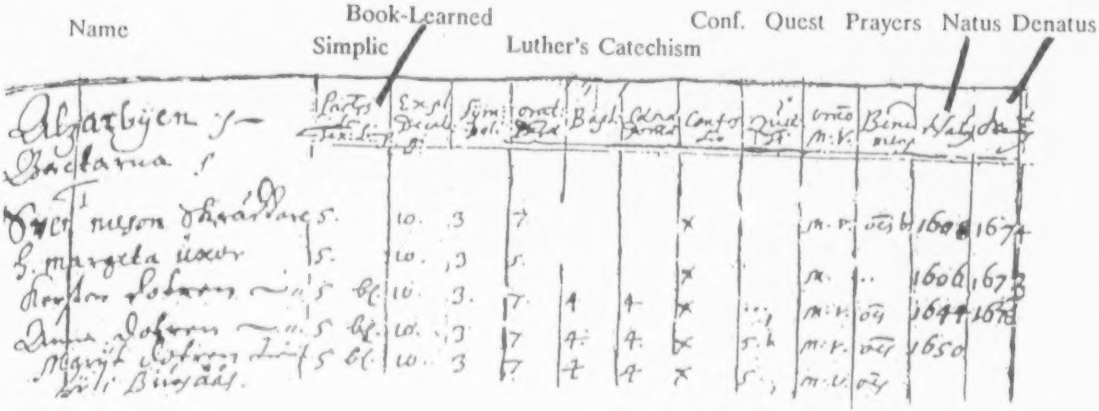
Name
Book-Learned
Simplic
Luther's Catechism
Conf.
Quest
Prayers
Natus
Denatus

Figure 4:2 Rättvik. Church Examination Register AI:1, 1670-90. Page 117.

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The columns in the church examination register can be explained best within a table broken down by gender and book reading "BL" (Table 4:3).

Table 4:3 Rättvik. Church Examination Register AI:1, 1670-90. The Oldest Born Before 1650, Divided According to Knowledge of Catechism, Gender and Book-Reading, "BL". N = 454.

| Catechism Knowledge | Book Learned "BL" | | Not Noted as "BL" | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| | 82 | 46 | 114 | 212 |
| | % | % | % | % |
| Partes simpliciter (The Five Texts) | 100 | 100 | 99 | 100 |
| Explicationes (Small Catechism with Luther's Explanation) | - | - | - | - |
| Decalogus (Ten Commandments) | 96 | 100 | 90 | 92 |
| Symbolum (Articles of Faith) | 96 | 100 | 69 | 90 |
| Oratio Domin. (The Lords Prayer) | 89 | 99 | 27 | 65 |
| Baptismus (The Baptism) | 66 | 91 | 9 | 31 |
| Sacra caena (Holy Communion) | 65 | 81 | 11 | 28 |
| Confessio (Confession of Sin) | 99 | 100 | 99 | 100 |
| Questiones (Questions) | 43 | 55 | 4 | 4 |
| Matutin-vesp (Morning/Evening Prayer) | 92 | 100 | 77 | 70 |
| Bened. mensae (Table Prayers) | 87 | 94 | 67 | 54 |

This table concerns, hence, those older persons born before 1650. Here, we get a sense of the situation of reading before its emergence. In the earlier verbal tradition, the words of the Lord's Prayer, the Articles of Faith, and the Ten Commandments (*Partes simpliciter*), and the Confession of Sin (*Confessio*) served as a general measure of knowledge for which reading proficiency apparently was not absolutely essential. Here, there was a long verbal tradition.[7]

But, to be able to know Luther's explanation of the Catechism's five major texts (the Small Catechism) was something new. Those who were book learned were, of course, a step ahead. This knowledge seemed to be better utilized by the women who received better marks than the men. Also, among those who were not book learned, it could be clearly distinguished that the women were more advanced than the men. In explaining the three last major texts (the Lord's Prayer, the Baptism, and the Holy Communion), the differences were as large as between 27 and 65 per cent, 9 and 31 per cent, and 11 and 28 per cent, respectively. Consequently, the emerging reading proficiency can be noted within the Small Catechism, where there are clearly better results for the book learned of both genders, and with further emphasis of women, who as a whole were more engaged in religious matters in the church culture.

On the third ability level, *Questiones*, with further questions on the Catechism, both men and women were similarly beginners. This was a different kind of knowledge which would increase with the coming reading proficiency. Here was an indication of the deeper lying knowledge process, where the women went ahead in the parish life's demand upon a growing use of prayers and texts. They had good results already verbally, and would continue to maintain this even in reading.

The new Church Law of 1686, just as other regulations came, naturally, to gather and reflect customs in all the earlier situations with the proposal to sketch parishioners in the church examination register divided into three groups: those who could simply read the texts; those who could manage Luther's explanations; and those who could in addition conceive of and understand the questions, "*hustavlan*" (the rules of social order), etc.[8]

Here, we gain a sense of which books would become the basic texts in the evolving reading tradition, namely, the ABC book, the Catechism, the Hymn Book, and the Book of Questions. The books found in Rättvik's households, therefore, will be considered here.

When the texts increased in number and difficulty, in both scope and content, the letters and readings gained their natural function in the continued development. A church examination register in Rättvik, Dalarna, from the 1720s, gives us a good indication of the texts and books which were essential within the reading tradition (Figure 4:3).[9]

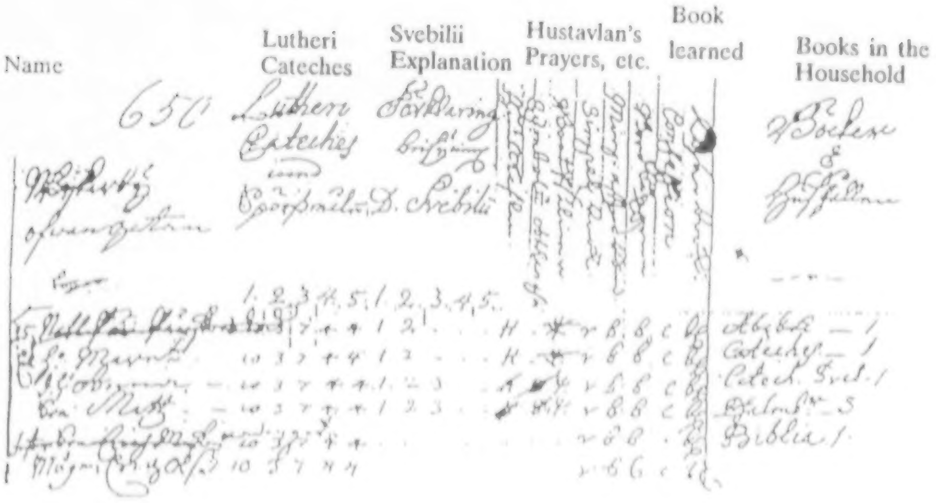
Name
Lutheri Catecheis
Svebilii Explanation
Hustavlan's Prayers, etc.
Book learned
Books in the Household
650
1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
Biblia 1

Figure 4:3 Rättvik. Church Examination Register AI:1, 1720-t.
Books Within the Household. Page 650.

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In Rättvik, around 1722, there were about 800 fairly defined households with a total of more than 5,000 inhabitants. The total number of books was around 3,400, among them, ABC books for younger children's spelling and reading lessons, Catechisms for the youth to learn by heart, and a large number of hymn books and manuals. The hymn book from 1695 comprised of close to a thousand pages of songs and text for singing and reading in both the home and in church. Some Hymns were initially popular in the communities, and were circulated as leaflets, but were not always used in the church. The books were distributed among the households according to the figures in Table 4:4.[10]

Table 4:4 Rättvik.Church Examination Register. AI:1, 1720s. Books in the Household. Household N=approx. 3,400.

| The Number of Books | N | Households With Books Total (per cent) | The Number of Books Per Household (in per cent) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6+ |
| ABC Book | (457) | 55 | 52 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Catechism | (859) | 91 | 77 | 12 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Hymn Book | (1753) | 92 | 30 | 28 | 20 | 7 | 5 | 2 |
| Svebilius | (172) | 21 | 20 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Bible | (29) | 4 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other | (190) | 20 | 13 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | (3460) | 95 | | | | | | |

In total, 95 per cent of the households were noted to have books. The book for beginners was found in over half, 55 per cent, of the households. These were rather simple ABC booklets, where the old verbal tradition's classic words for the Lord's Prayer, and Articles of Faith were spelled out in the first spelling and reading lessons. These booklets were useful items in a family with children, and seldom remained intact for the next generation. Due to this, they are largely unknown in, for example, the inventories made up after one's death and in the literature. But, here they emerge in their correct use in Rättvik's reading environment. Later, they will have their own column in the church examination registers throughout the country.

The Catechism for rote knowledge, was found in almost all of the homes (91 per cent), but as a rule (77 per cent) only one copy in each household. These books were disposable in nature and were almost never left in book collections or noted in inventories.

The Hymn Book was nonetheless the most common book 92 per cent of the households had at least one Hymn Book, 28 per cent had two, and those households with three or more totalled 34 per cent. On Sundays in church it was important to have the Hymn Books for readings and songs, preferably one book for the men and one book for the women, because they sat on different sides of the aisle.

Bishop Svebilius' long explanation of 1689, the Bible and other spiritual books were found in less numbers according to this church examination register. They were part of the continuing development and were increasing in numbers within many areas, with the evolving reading culture.

The share of book learned ("BL") had risen over a number of decades from around 60 per cent in the 1680s (Table 4:2) up to 78 per cent in the 1720s. But the older generations with their weak reading ability were still included in the statistics. There were changes between the generations in ability to read.

In a comparative examination of a group of parishes where even notations on writing were found in the church examination registers, it was found that the results of women are quite different.

## The Women and Writing Ability

Thus, in the teaching of children, rote memory, and the evolving reading tradition, women played an important role. Yet, it was different with the writing ability. This was not considered in the church's reading tradition. Writing was not essential for the reading tradition of the church, for Sundays and for common people, but had more to do with the daily work and occupations. However, in the old Danish provinces in the south of Sweden, there were columns included in the church examination registers for the art of writing. Below we consider the deanery furthest to the south, Skytt deanery, where the fishing town of Skanör-Falsterbo, and four other rural parishes with a total of eight parishes, are analyzed by comparing the church examination registers from 1702-1740. Figure 4:4 provides an illustration of the reading and writing marks in the deanery's urban and rural parishes.[11]

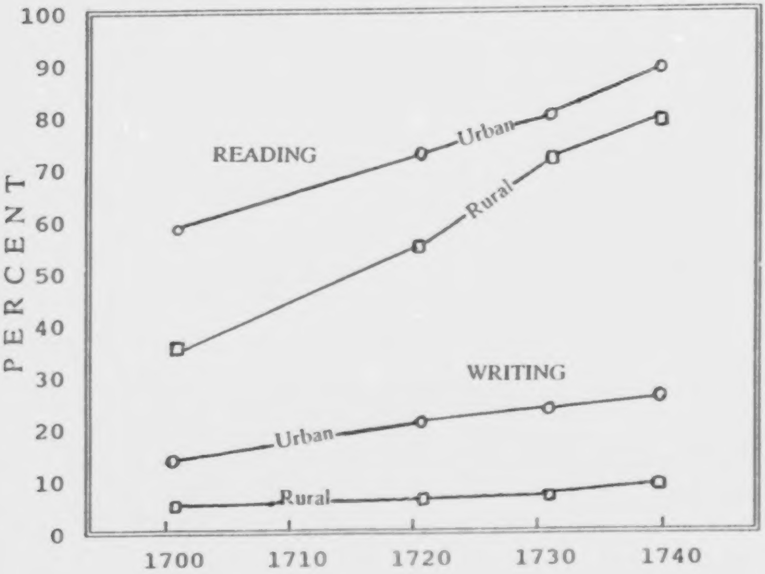

Figure 4:4 The Deanery of Skytt. Skåne. Katekisationslängder 1702-40. Reading and Writing in Skanör-Falsterbo and in Four Rural Parishes (Table 4:6, note 12)

Here we need to resort to both of the mentioned patterns. Reading marks increased for both rural and urban and became universal towards the middle of the century according to the pattern for "mass literacy". Even writing increased, but only in the urban areas where there was more need, according to the pattern for "selective literacy". The need for writing within the rural setting remained at a unchanged low level. Therefore, we shall take this analysis further within the urban setting.

Among the urban inhabitants this double pattern is repeated. The differences between males and females disappear with time in reading marks, but become more pronounced in ability to write (Figure 4:5).

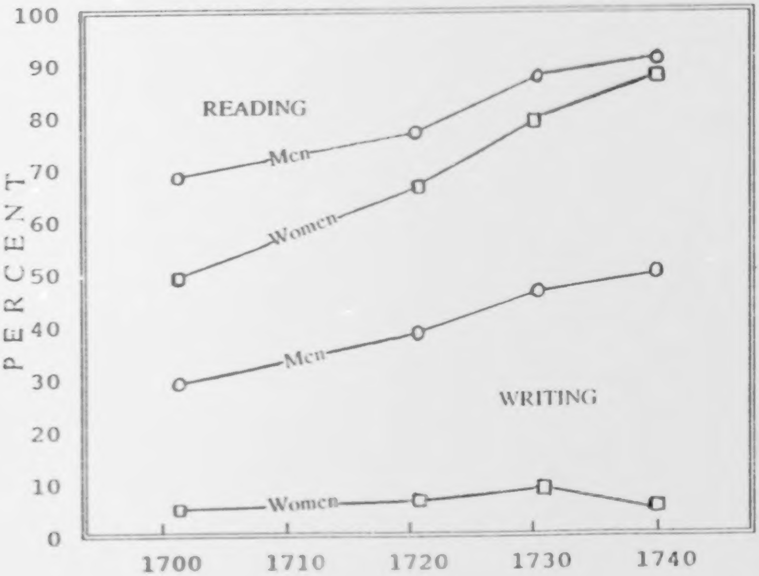

Figure 4:5 Urban Inhabitants in Skanör-Falsterbo. Skåne. Katekisationslängder 1702-40. Reading and Writing for Men and Women (Table 4:7, note 13).

The pattern from Leksand and Rättvik come up again in the question of reading. After a few generations, the women had caught up with the men. Writing ability, on the other hand, belonged to the men's professional environment in the city. There, the share of writing marks for men increased to 52 per cent, while for women, it remained between 5 and 10 per cent. Here, there appears the double analysis pattern for "mass" and "selective literacy" again. The women became important actors in the reading tradition. The men continued to need and practice the art of writing in their urban occupations with their craftswork and trading.[14]

These results can be compared with corresponding studies in German church examination registers (*Seelenregister*) where even writing and arithmetic were noted. One such study is taken from Oldenburg for 1675-1750 (Table 4:5).[15]

Table 4:5 Oldenburg, Germany. Church Examination Register from 1675-1750. Reading, Writing and Arithmetic 1675, 1735 and 1750.

| | Men | | | Women | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1675<br>% | 1735<br>% | 1750<br>% | 1675<br>% | 1735<br>% | 1750<br>% |
| Reading | 73 | 98 | 99 | 51 | 94 | 99 |
| Writing | 47 | 80 | 75 | 10 | 49 | 44 |
| Arithmetic | 15 | 47 | 36 | - | 7 | 7 |

The resemblances with the Swedish results are striking. This becomes even clearer when the data are in diagram form (Figure 4:6).

At the beginning the differences were large between men and women. As for the reading part they became equal, but the differences persisted in writing, where women remained at a much lower level. School activities can be noticed clearly from the German results, concerning writing and arithmetic, but in arithmetic women did not get the occasion to distinguish themselves.

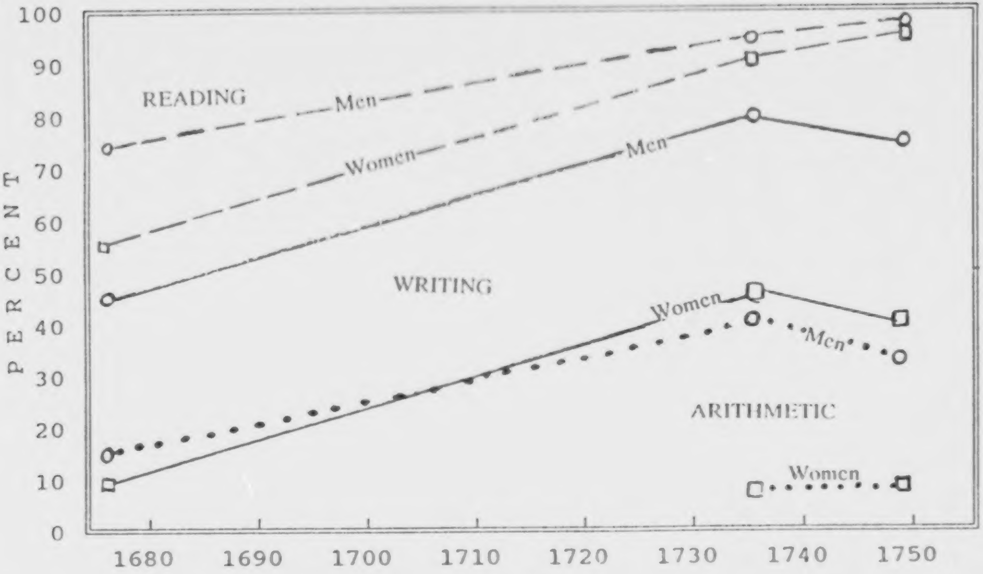

**Figure 4:6** Oldenburg, Germany. The Church Examination Registers from 1675, 1735, 1750. Reading, Writing and Arithmetic for Men and Women. (Compare with Table 4:5 above).

## Summary

Within Protestant countries, as a whole, the church's reading tradition had a widespread effect. The women's performance became, after a short time, as good as the men's. The women took part more actively in the instruction of children according to the Swedish documentation. But, as to writing ability, the men dominated for a long time due to the need within their professions to be able to write and use basic arithmetic. A few centuries' attempt, with various schools, could not change this picture extensively. Only with the universal school attendance in the late 19th century, writing and reading would become common for both males and females.[16]

## Notes

1. For additional background, see discussions, references and notes in Johansson, E. "The History of Literacy in Sweden". In: Graff, H. (ed.) *Literacy and Social Development in the West: A Reader*. Cambridge, 1981, pp.151-183. And Johansson, E. "Literacy Campaigns in Sweden". In: Arnove, R.J. & Graff H. (eds.) *National Literacy Campaigns. Historical and Comparative Perspectives*. New York, 1987, pp.65-98.
2. Leksand Church Archives (kyrkoarkiv). *Personaliebok*,F:5, 1706-1721.
3. Leksand Church Archives (kyrkoarkiv). *Husförhörslängd*AI:1 1672-89.
4. For example, see Johansson, E. 1987, p.79.
5. Rättvik Church Archives (kyrkoarkiv). *Husförhörslängd* AI:1 1670-90.
6. Gudmundson, E. *Äldre Skolväsen*. In: Rättvik, I:2, Västerås, 1967, pp. 214-218.
7. Johansson, E. "Pater Noster i Rafnasill och Alphabeta varia. Eller några av kyrkolivets techen" (Pater Noster in Rafnasill och Alphabeta varia. Or Some indicators of the Life of the Church). In: *Arkivet, Historien, Rörelsen*. To Sven Lundkvist, 60 år. Stockholm, 1987 p.77.
8. The Church Law of 1686 (Kyrkolagen av år 1686) Chapter 2, par. 10. See Johansson, E. 1981, p.153ff, 1987, p.73ff.
9. Rättvik's Church Archives (kyrkoarkiv). *Husförhörslängd* AI:1 1720-t.
10. This record is split up in the sources. One part of the parish, some

397 houses, is analyzed in Wiklund, K.B. *Om Rättviks bokförråd vid miten av 1700-talet*. Vestmanland-Dala nations skriftserie, 3-4, 1931-33, pp.156-160, and Gudmunson, 1967, pp.218-219.

11. Johansson, E. 1987, pp.89-92.
12. Examination of Catechisms (Katekisationslängder) 1702-40, figures of reading (R) and writing (WR). Skytts deanary, Skåne.

Table 4:6 Examination of Catechisms (Katekisationslängder) 1702-40. Figures of reading (R) and Writing (WR). Skytts Deanery, Skåne.

| Parish | 1702 N | R % | WR % | 1721 N | R % | WR % | 1731 N | R % | WR % | 1740 N | R % | WR % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Skanör/Falsterbo | 259 | 68 | 14 | 280 | 73 | 24 | 266 | 84 | 26 | 264 | 90 | 25 |
| Hammarlöv/Vemmerlöv | 221 | 35 | 7 | 189 | 62 | 12 | 211 | 86 | 10 | 244 | 86 | 25 |
| St/L Slågarp | 236 | 41 | 8 | - | - | - | 412 | 66 | 7 | 394 | 78 | 6 |
| V/Fru Alstad | 309 | 41 | 4 | 329 | 55 | 9 | 406 | 60 | 6 | 436 | 72 | 7 |
| Gyllie/Kyrkoköpinge | 236 | 38 | 4 | - | - | - | 271 | 74 | 6 | 239 | 78 | 6 |

13. Examination of Catechisms (Katekisationslängder) 1702-40. The urban people in Skanör-Falsterbo.

Table 4:7 Examination of Catechisms (Katekisationslängder) 1704-40. The Urban People in Skåne-Falsterbo.

| | Total N | Reading % | Writing % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1702 Male | 133 | 68 | 32 |
| Female | 124 | 50 | 3 |
| 1721 Male | 142 | 77 | 43 |
| Female | 138 | 68 | 4 |
| 1731 Male | 142 | 87 | 43 |
| Female | 123 | 80 | 9 |
| 1740 Male | 122 | 90 | 52 |
| Female | 142 | 90 | 2 |

14. See Johansson, E. 1987 *et al.*
15. Norden, W. "Die Alphabetisirung der oldenburgishchen Kustenmarsch im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert". In: Hinrichs, E. & Norden, W. *Regionalgeschichte--Probleme und Beispiele*. Hildesheim, 1980, pp.103-164 ff.
16. For further discussions, see Johansson, E. "Some Roots of Literacy". Umeå University, 1990, in print.

## Chapter Five

# Literacy as a Catalyst for Development
With Special Reference to Women in Zimbabwe

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### Introduction

This paper examines literacy in relation to development and considers the specific case of women and literacy in Zimbabwe. In this context, discussions focus on the concepts of "literacy" and "development", why literacy is associated with development, socio-economic background of women illiterates in Zimbabwe, and the Zimbabwean approach to literacy. The concluding section contains a summary and prospects for future action.

### The Concept of Literacy

According to Gray (1976), "literacy" is the ability to read, write and calculate simple arithmetic. This simple definition which seems to reduce the concept of literacy to the traditional 3Rs, has been expanded in terms of interpretation over the years to include functional, conscientizing and life oriented approaches.

The 1965 report of the World Congress of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy explained "functional" or work oriented literacy as the type that focusses on skills and promotes productivity and participation of the target population in order to meet their basic needs. Elaborating on this approach, the World Congress stated:

> Rather than an end in itself, (functional) literacy should be regarded as a way of preparing man for a social, civic and economic role that goes beyond the limits of rudimentary literacy training consisting merely in the teaching of reading and writing. The very process of learning to read and write should be made an opportunity for acquiring information that can immediately be used for improving living standards; reading and writing should lead not only to elementary general knowledge but training for work, increased productivity, greater participation in civic life and better understanding of the surrounding world, and could ultimately open the way to basic human culture (UNESCO 1965).

Since then, literacy seems to have been increasingly seen in the light of social as well as economic development. Harman (1974) talks of social and economic growth as being factors that are interdependent, and states that literacy can no longer be considered "as a precondition for other elements of development but rather must be considered in conjunction with them".

In the 1960s, Paulo Freire advocated literacy which liberates people and which is closely linked with the need for the individual to develop critical consciousness resulting in social change and democratization. Literacy theory and practice has, since then, been widely influenced by the concepts and ideas of Freire.

In 1982, an international seminar on "Campaigning for Adult Literacy" discussed two models of development which have emerged from the "development education" experience. The "Motivational-Development" model and the "Structural-Development" model. The Motivational-Development model is used by development workers whose objective it is, to enable learners to become more productive and to participate in their social, political and economic institutions. According to this model, structural change is expected to come through an evolutionary process. Literacy is thus seen as an agent of encouraging more output and participation in existing social structures.

This model is in contrast to the Structural-Development Model which encourages the target population to transform the social order by taking control of its institutions. The Structural-Development Model is revolutionary and the role of literacy is to motivate people not only to create new institutions, but also to become more productive and more participative in the society's existing institutions. In this case, literacy is also used to support new relationships which develop during the process of revolution (see for instance Bhola 1982).

According to Zaman (1978) life oriented literacy approach is about literacy which is directed at all aspects of man's life. He argues that it creates political awareness, awakens social consciousness, enriches family life, develops all aspects of man and accelerates progress.

While some authorities do not differentiate between these different approaches or models of literacy, others do. However, it is clear that the choice of model for literacy work has depended on the political and economic context of the literacy programme and the philosophy of the government concerned. Decision regarding which approach to utilize comes at the stage when planners have to take into account the national needs as well as the needs of the adult illiterate. At the 1975 International Symposium for Literacy, held in Persepolis, a UNESCO document was presented which set literacy in the context of a general basic education process. Commenting on current trends in literacy, the document lists several areas where literacy may be expected to have impact:

- the improvement of living standards;
- the development of life skills;
- mastery of the environment;
- training for work;
- increased productivity;
- greater participation in civil life; and
- better understanding of the surrounding world.

These areas of impact indicate that literacy in adult education has, not only broad potential for development of the attitudes, skills and perceptions of individuals, but can also be a useful precursor to other adult basic education programmes (Baraille 1976).

## The Concept of Development

Experience and written evidence show that the concept of development means different things to different people and that it is in common use in many parts of the world. However, development may simply be stated as overall improvement of people's conditions of life, as seen and accepted first and foremost, by the people concerned.

An increasing number of people see development not as being concerned with material things, but as being concerned with human beings. As Julius Nyerere, the former President of Tanzania said, to develop people is not like building roads or wells: people cannot be developed by others, they must develop themselves.

Development occurs when people understand the oppressive conditions in which they live and act to change them. Development aims at the total improvement of each individuals social opportunities, economic security, political freedom and so on.

Experts have discussed the crisis of development as lying in the poverty of the masses of the Third World, as well as of others, whose needs, even the most basic like food, habitat, health and education, are not met. The crisis of development lies in the alienation and the deprivation of the masses, of the means to understand and master their social and political environment.

## Why Associate Literacy and Development?

Even traditional societies had their own forms of literacy which were aimed at enhancing knowledge, skills, and values required by individuals in their society. The Arabs had their Quranic literacy while that of the Africans was contained in many oral discourses and drama that were passed on from generation to generation.

Although Street (1989), referring to Harvey Graft's "The Literacy Myth", argues that the association of literacy with social mobility, economic progress, and escape from poverty is not borne by statistics, the negative assertion that development is not associated with literacy has not been statistically proved either. Until such a time that it is categorically proven that there is no positive association between literacy and development, it seems many authorities will continue to make the now traditional assumption that literacy is a catalyst for development. On the other hand, a number of indicators have led some people to generally accept that literacy increases both productivity and general income levels. Desai and Punalekar (1971) concluded from a study of industrial workers in Bombay that literacy leads to increased productivity.

An increasing number of integrated multisectoral development projects are today including education components (like literacy) to help attain sectoral goals and sometimes as a separate sectoral project. This is because although there is no generally satisfactory theory on the relationship between education and development, it is assumed and accepted that under certain conditions, education acts as accelerator in the development process.

Education enables people to take part in social processes and developments which go beyond their experience but nevertheless affect their lives. It opens up new horizons and sources of information. This is why in many countries education is regarded as a fundamental right. The Maslow school of thought specifically regards it as a basic need comparable to other basic needs like food, shelter and health.

Although the cause of the accelerator effect has not been investigated systematically, results from studies sponsored by the World Bank confirm that in most cases agriculture earnings are higher among educated farmers than they are among the uneducated group. The difference between the two groups is more significant in areas of modern environment than in areas of non-modern environment (See Table 5:1).

Table 5:1 Productivity Change for Four Years of School Education in "Non-Modern" and "Modern" Third World Environments.

| Percentage Change in Productivity for Four Years | Non-Modern Environment (% of Studies) | Modern Environment (% of Studies) |
|---|---|---|
| - 6.0 | 10.1 | - |
| - 2.0 | 17.5 | 3.9 |
| + 2.0 | 29.3 | 25.5 |
| + 6.0 | 31.3 | 22.1 |
| +10.0 | 11.8 | 14.2 |
| +14.0 | - | 16.6 |
| +18.0 | - | 99.9 |
| | 100 | n = 23 |

Evidence has also shown that educated farmers have a significantly higher rate of adoption of innovations and frequency of contacts with extension services than farmers without any school education. It has further been noted that the behaviours of farmers with school education in a community also influences the innovative behaviour of the other farmers (Bergmann 1985).

Educational planners generally believe that literacy leads to development in various fields. Fisher & Noor (1982) presents a strong case of the role of literacy in development with reference to health and nutrition, food production, overall information levels and life expectancy.

Scholars are conducting studies to determine the contribution of literacy to development. Although some studies give literacy less importance, it appears that at some stage, a country needs a literate population to achieve its development goals. Illiteracy means for most people the inability to read and write in their home language. For the woman who wants to improve her status, to become self-sufficient, it is obviously important to be able to read educational material. Sometimes reading about other people and the ideas they have used to bring about change is as stimulating as seeing how others do it and certainly cheaper. Literacy is therefore important for a woman who is searching for ways to improve her life.

Literacy also has the effect of boosting self-confidence. The women who have just learned how to write simple sentences become very keen to learn more; not only more writing skills but more about the world and how their lives can be improved. It is as if their own inability to read and write made them feel so inadequate that they could not face the challenge of changing their lives until the first small challenge of illiteracy was overcome. Literacy therefore, represents for many women, the acquisition of one essential tool for bringing about development. This has, at least been the case in many rural situations in Zimbabwe.

## Women and Literacy in Zimbabwe

### Background Information.

Zimbabwe covers an area of about 390,000 square kilometres and has a population of about 10 million people with an annual growth rate of about 3 per cent which places it among the fastest growing countries of the world. The country has a very young population of which approximately 47 per cent is under the age of 15 and this means that the country has a high child dependency ratio.

Although Zimbabwe has a well diversified economy with advanced industrial and monetary sectors, its economy depends to a large extent on the export of raw materials of agricultural origin (41 per cent of all merchandise exported) and of the mineral sector (27 per cent) which have to earn foreign exchange needed for the import industrial raw material and capital goods (84 per cent of total imports) as well as consumer goods (16 per cent).

The economy is characterized by dualism which is reflected in gross income and wealth inequalities between and within economic sectors and population groups. This particularly holds for crop and livestock production where large scale commercial farmers produce more crops and livestock in comparison with "communal area" farmers ("communal areas" are rural areas where indigenous peasants farmer live). The basis of these differences lies in the pre-independence land distribution policies which led to 5,400 large scale farms occupying some 15.6 million hectares to be allocated to white people while 700,000 farming families of indigenous stock were allocated 174 separate communal areas covering some 16.4 million hectares. The communal Areas are located largely in the poorest natural regions while commercial farms occupy the best land in the country.

## The Women of Zimbabwe.

The majority of the rural population in Zimbabwe, namely some 4.63 million people live in communal areas which are usually located in areas of low rainfall (less than 600 mm) of hilly broken land with poor sandy soil, and with limited agricultural activity. The majority of the people living in these areas are women with young and old dependants. It is women whose men folk are away in search for employment to supplement the family income. These women carry an immense workload, and have to, among other things: rear and care for children; fetch water; tend large family plots and fields; take maize to mills for grinding; cultivate food crops; search for firewood; grind cereal and groundnuts by hand; keep chickens and other small animals for food; and provide labor for men's crops. In the absence of men, they also have to herd cattle in summer months; take cattle to dip; guard crops against baboons; and do agricultural work, marketing and attend to nearly everything that concerns the household.

These are the women who are being referred to in the country statistics, which indicate that in 1981 for instance, about 1.9 million people in Zimbabwe were illiterate or semi-literate and that of these

60 per cent were women. Bearing mind that women constitute the majority in Zimbabwe (about 51 per cent) and that most of them are, in fact, the rural communal dwellers, it is clear that any efforts to improve their situation results in the overall betterment of the whole nation. The common adage that "educate one woman and you educate the whole family" is significant in a country like Zimbabwe. Women play a pivotal role in development not only because of their numbers or because of their traditional role of looking after the family but also for the great potential they have demonstrated for sustaining whole societal and social processes.

Zimbabwe found itself at independence in 1980 with about 1.9 million people who were illiterate or semi-literate largely because of the unfavourable educational policies of the previous regimes which favoured the education of settlers at the expense of that of the indigenous people. The majority of the uneducated people were women partly because of cultural biases of the patriarchal society that preferred the education of boys in cases of inadequate resources and various other factors. The situation is gradually changing as both the population and the government of Zimbabwe becomes more conscious of and adopts policies promoting development with equity.

**Literacy in Zimbabwe: Implementation and Basic Policy.** Organizations implementing literacy programmes in Zimbabwe include The Adult Education Literacy Organization of Zimbabwe (ALOZ). The Ministry of Primary & Secondary Education, and individual organizations such as churches, private industrial concerns, parastatals and commercial farms. These organizations have a common goal: eradication of adult illiteracy in Zimbabwe.

ALOZ has been working in the field of adult literacy in Zimbabwe since 1963. Its declared aim in 1970 was wiping out illiteracy. This general aim has been expanded over the years until 1981, when a statement was issued outlining the organization's philosophy and objectives. Among other things, the statement mentioned the improvement of the standard of living and quality of life of adult literacy students through:

a) enabling them to consider family and local problems by sharing common experience;
b) helping them to discover local resources (extension workers, local government bodies, local community leaders);
c) encouraging them to see themselves as resources, both individually and in the process of group co-operation and encouraging them to join community action bodies;
d) assisting them to establish projects; and
e) equipping them with necessary literacy and numeracy skills they need for full participation in family, community and citizenship activities (ALOZ 1980:1).

This statement gives an indication of not only the philosophical approach ALOZ follows in its adult literacy programmes, but that of the other organizations as well. Since the attainment of independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has expanded adult literacy services through the National Literacy Campaign which was effective from 1983 and instituted by the Government of Zimbabwe initially through the Community Development and Women's Affairs Ministry, and now, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

Because ALOZ has trained most adult literacy teachers in Zimbabwe, including teachers of the other implementing organizations, the philosophical approach to literacy in Zimbabwe is somewhat standardized, similar and falls under the functional approach already discussed under the section that dealt with the concept of literacy.

The Zimbabwe approach to literacy emphasizes the selection and training of literacy teachers from villages, factories, farms and so on. It is the people from the various communities that are trained to teach their own folks and this is a essential aspect of the participatory approach to development. Zimbabwe is now moving towards the psycho-social method of an integrated nature which takes literacy to various developmental programmes like the Water and Sanitation Programme, Health for All by the Year 2000, and Workers Education programmes.

## The Students.

There are both rural and urban students but the former are in the majority. In general there are relatively few men in literacy programmes partly because numerically, it is mostly the women who are illiterate, but at the same time, men are often embarrassed to accept that they are illiterate. They would therefore rather perpetuate the myth that they can read and write than be seen in a literacy class.

## The Literacy Package.

The ALOZ literacy package which has been in use for over 16 years now is generally used in the literacy programmes. Packages are put together taking environmental and other factors into consideration. For example, there is a rural package for illiterate peasant farmers in selected areas of the country. The farmers, most of whom are women, first go to join literacy classes. The classes, run by local people trained as teachers, offer functional literacy, but in this case, literacy is linked to modern farming methods and savings clubs. When the women become literate, they learn from the functional literacy booklets about new ploughing methods, how to sow, cultivate and reap various crops, and how to use fertilizer.

Most of the women are immediately interested, but the common constraints are lack of cash and credit. ALOZ uses a fund to help farmers buy the inputs for their immediate needs. At this point the local agricultural extension worker is directly involved, giving the right training for particular local conditions.

Using fertilizer and treated seed, the farmers usually reap a better crop. The borrowed money is repaid, and then the literacy teacher introduces the idea of savings clubs. Here literacy students voluntarily save small amounts of money regularly in preparation for the next season. These clubs also form buying groups, for buying supplies in bulk, and soon learn to do their own ordering after help from the teacher.

The package literacy programme was introduced after realizing the inadequacy of straight literacy training without scope for immediate application. Many recipients of literacy skills soon became semi-literate or even relapsed to illiteracy. The package described above (literacy, agricultural extension and collective savings) has worked well for rural women. The package can be extended to include other aspects such as appropriate technology concepts. The ALOZ experience has been that women could not, if illiterate, make full use of extension ideas available to them.

## Sustaining Literacy.

It is generally understood that no literacy campaigns should be started unless and until there has been provision for adequate, appropriate and accessible materials for follow-up practice by neo-literates. If literacy is to be effective and lasting, it needs to be supported by an infrastructure that provides the literates with adequate reading materials capable of sustaining a literate environment in the long-term. On the other hand, follow-up post-literacy should not merely imply reinforcement of literacy techniques but should aim at creating an environment that encourages individuals to act effectively as literates in daily life and to react critically to their understanding of reality.

In other words, the neo-literate should be able to go beyond what she has acquired in the course of the literacy programme, and apply her new knowledge above all, to relevant decision-making, in order to take an active part in the continuing process of overall national development.

In Zimbabwe, after students learn mother tongue literacy, Shona or Ndebele, numeracy, how to tell the time, conversational English and English (reading and writing) normally to the level required for the sixth year of primary school, they are provided with reading material that covers such topics as nutrition, child care, home craft, improved farming methods, poultry-keeping, road safety, first aid, occupational safety, family budgeting, family relationship, keeping farm records and small-scale income generation. Much of the reading material includes discussion topics and practical work exercises. Students are also encouraged to develop income-generating activities, either as individuals or as co-operatives and to form group savings societies.

The Kudyara Mbeu Yedzidzo Association (KUMYA) which means "planting the seed of knowledge", is a welfare organization which was initially formed to promote neighbourhood home libraries and story-telling groups for children. Catering for the needs of the newly literate students has now become one of the objectives of KUMYA. Neo-literates are encouraged to join home library groups and be active participants. Neo-literates are given opportunities to borrow books which are usually commensurate with their level of literacy. Those with children are encouraged to read stories to them and those with grown up children are encouraged to read to the children of their relatives or members of the home library groups when these are in session once or so a week. Participation in home-library and story-telling groups has proved to be an excellent way of sustaining the literacy skills acquired. As a non-profit making organization, KUMYA receives donations, some in the form of children's books, from many parts of the world. All such books expose the neo-literates who read them to knowledge about other cultures. This has proved to be enriching experience to many neo-literates.

## Concluding Remarks

This paper discussed the concepts of "literacy" and "development" together with their relationship. It was shown that although there may be no conclusive evidence of the association of literacy with development, there were studies that had led some people to accept that literacy was a catalyst for development.

The aspect of women and literacy in Zimbabwe was considered and the situation of women, particularly the point that the majority of the illiterates were in fact women was also highlighted. Implementing organizations together with the functional philosophical stance that is guiding literacy programmes in Zimbabwe were examined. Zimbabwe's approach to sustaining literacy among the neo-literates was summarized.

Zimbabwe seems to be well committed to eradication of illiteracy. However, there is need to broaden the forms of literacy offered to women in order to equip them fully to perform the many different roles that they play in their society. There is a need to organise workshops and courses to further educate women according to their felt needs and the way to find out the women's felt needs is to conduct periodic surveys.

With particular reference to women, there are many types of literacy that would still need to be a acquired even after one has completed primary, secondary or even tertiary levels of education. It is amazing to discover the number of women who need budgetary literacy, shopping literacy, law literacy, environmental literacy and so on. It is these forms of literacy that should be tackled in order to enable women to control their own destiny and participate fully in the building of their nation in terms of development. The most common modern type of illiteracy that many people do not mind admitting that they lack is computer literacy. But there are many other types that people do not have and yet, are necessary in order to have a more fulfilling life.

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## Chapter Six

# Post Literacy: An Equalizing Tool
## The Case of Tanzania

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### Background

When Tanzania became independent in 1961 a vast majority of its adult population was illiterate. This was considered a major hindrance for political and economic development and considerable efforts were made to deal with the problem. Various literacy campaigns were organized and thus literacy rate increased rapidly; from 25 per cent in 1961 to 73 per cent in 1977. Figures from the national literacy test in 1986 indicate that about 90 per cent of the Tanzanian adult population are now literate. However, ongoing studies have provided data that contradict the high figure of literacy, thus there is the need of further research in this field.

The need of a programme to cater for neo-literates became obvious at an early stage, as the number of them increased. The first national post literacy programme became operational in 1978. Its objectives were to help learners to acquire increased knowledge and skills relevant for their daily work and the solving of their daily problems. It also aimed at creating a literate environment for the Tanzanian people and to promote national development and self-reliance.

However, this post literacy programme turned out to be too theoretical for many of the learners. It was therefore decided to create a new curriculum with a more work-oriented content and with an income-generating component. SIDA who had been sponsoring adult education from the beginning agreed to support the programme by funding production of teaching materials and by providing hand tools for practical work at a number of post literacy centres. After a period of planning and revision, the preparations for the new programme entered their final stage during 1987. Textbooks for the learners and teachers guides were prepared and pre-tested, teachers were trained at a number of Folk Development Colleges during a period of three weeks, and tools for the home economics and crafts centres were ordered.

The revised post literacy programme offered three different courses to the learners: agriculture, crafts and home economics. Curriculum and textbooks written in a way that corresponded to the traditional pattern of division of labor, e.g. women were expected to go to the home economics and men to crafts classes. In agriculture both men and women were supposed to participate. The tools to be obtained for the post literacy centres fit into the same pattern: sewing machines and kitchen utensils for home economics and carpentry tools for the crafts centres. Only belatedly was the question as to whether the programme paid attention to the most urgent problems and needs of Tanzanian women ever raised. The Ministry of Education then decided that it was necessary to look carefully into the post literacy programme to assess its relevancy for women participants.

A Women Expert Group, consisting of professional Tanzanian women working in the field of education, was formed and given the assignment to evaluate curriculum and materials. It was then decided that a field study was required to identify the women participants' actual and everyday problems and needs. One such study was conducted early in 1987 in one district in each of the Coast, Arusha, Morogoro and Iringa regions. Based on the outcome of the study, recommendations were made about how to improve curriculum and materials on equality and gender aspects. It was also suggested that the programme should widen the scope of the subject matter content in each of the three courses (Ministry of Education & SIDA 1987).

## The Situation of Women in Rural Tanzania

The Women Expert Group started its work by looking into what already was known about the situation of women in Tanzania. Their findings state that in Tanzania, women are the major agricultural producers responsible for about 70 per cent of food crop production and supply about 80 per cent of the work hours in this field. Women are by tradition responsible for providing food for the household and thus most of the crops they grow are used for this purpose. The woman cultivates and weeds the major food crop, which she stores and processes after harvesting. Often she grows vegetables and other food crops interspersed with the major staple. Furthermore, she provides an increasing amount of labor in cash crop production, though the financial profits are collected and controlled by the man.

Despite their major input in agricultural production, women face serious restrictions which interfere with and hinder their productivity. Limited access to resources is a major problem. Women often have difficulty in getting access to suitable land. Where land pressure occurs women are usually given second place in allocation. Thus in areas with intensive cash crop production, women may be forced to grow their food crops at plots far from the village and where the land many be of poor quality.

The quality of inputs is another factor affecting women's productivity. Technology in the food production circle is generally kept at a low level. Women mainly use the hoe, which is physically strenuous and results in low productivity in relation to work hours. Lack of access to credit input remains a major obstacle. Without credit women cannot obtain insecticide and fertilizer, or pay the rent for an ox-plough or a tractor. The Cooperative Movement, which is the major credit source in the rural areas does not concern itself with women's particular credit needs, but focusses mainly on cash crops. Agricultural extension officers also concentrate on cash crops or male owned and contrølled livestock. Women's crops and small livestock are more or less left outside extension services. A final obstacle to high productivity is women's heavy work load. Women provide the bulk of the labor input in farming and they also carry the whole burden of biological and social reproduction.

In the present Tanzanian society where traditional form of education is dying out, women and men are not given information or education on the physical and emotional effects of pregnancy, child birth and menopause. Knowledge of contraception and family planning is generally limited to those married women whose husbands are willing to allow them to attend the clinics where they can receive this kind of information. Society has ignored the need to provide proper nutrition for pregnant and lactating women. Neither has there been much effort to reduce women's labor burden during pregnancy and lactation. Inadequate health facilities add to the problem of a high maternal death rate, particularly in the rural areas. Maternity problems are still the major cause of female deaths in Tanzania. It has also been established that almost 50 per cent of child deaths in Tanzania occur during the first year of life, the majority in the first four weeks. These statistics indicate that poor nutrition and deficient health care, as well as the heavy work load of pregnant and lactating women are the main reasons for infant mortality (UNICEF 1985).

Women's role in social reproduction includes the tasks of child-rearing, caring for the sick and elderly, and entertaining guests, added to the daily maintenance of the household involving supply of food, water, firewood and other form of domestic inputs. Women are also supposed to provide necessities such as soap, kerosene, salt, sugar and family clothing which all require cash resource. Although the work of social reproduction often is considered to be a "service" it is actually a form of labor which contributes to national productivity. Women are in fact reproducing the future labor force. Without women's labor input the economy could not be sustained. Therefore it should be recognized that this labor is a key factor for the economic health of a nation and that it has an economic value. According to Sivard (1985) this work at an average amounts to one third of the economic product.

Women have been given little community support to fulfil the above tasks. There is a lack of health facilities, medicine, day care centres, milling machines and other technical facilities. Neither are there efforts made to construct and produce labor saving devices for women. Not only does the community as such fail to provide adequate support, also the male members of the household refuse to accept responsibility for reproduction demands. Husbands' contribution to family upkeep is assumed as optional or voluntary. Particularly in rural areas where men are employed in wage labor, leaving the women as the cultivators, the male contribution to family economy may become virtually nil. This combined lack of financial and labor sharing creates one of the most serious problems for women. The fact is, women's work load and her responsibilities for social reproduction have increased while the family resources at her disposal are diminishing.

Despite their major role in production and social reproduction as discussed above, women are excluded from the decision making process to a large extent. They are not considered owners of the means of production, nor of the resources for reproduction. They have, therefore, little say or control over the usage and allocation of such resources. In biological reproduction, women have little say over the number of the children, or choice of husband. In regard to social reproduction, women do not control socialization of children, particularly boys. Women have little control over or say in the allocation of family resources, for instance food distribution, use of cash income, sale of livestock or their produce, sale of crops from the family land etc. Decisions which should be shared by parents, such as those regarding schooling, marriage and inheritance are often taken by the male parent and/or male relatives.

Procedures for family decision-making are dominated by male family heads and male members of the community, for instance in cases of solving marital problems and disputes, divorce and separation, child custody, and violence against women. In this way, even at the lowest level of decision-making and organization, the family, women's views carry little weight.

In summary, the key problems of women in the rural areas could be referred to three categories: the oppressive division of labor in production and social reproduction; the unequal ownership of and access to resources; and the secondary status of women in the decision-making process.

Against this background the importance of the post-literacy programme as an agent for changing unequal practices stands out distinctly. The post literacy programme constitutes a major effort to reach people at grass root level with skills and knowledge that should enable them to improve their life situation and also become agents of change in their environment.

## Revision of the Post-Literacy Programme

It was established during the evaluative study conducted by the Women Expert Group (Ministy of Education 1987) that the post-literacy textbooks and curriculum failed to pay sufficient attention to women's real needs and problems, and that the method of presentation might have a negative impact on women's status and hence indirectly on their overall situation. Therefore, it was decided by the Ministry of Education that the books should be revised with the purpose of introducing equity and equality aspects into the whole reading material. The ambition was to produce books which cancelled out valuations tending to reinforce traditional biases and unequal practices. The necessity for more equal sharing of the overall work load, equal access to household resources and equal influence on decisions involving the well-being of the household was to be given special emphasis. Further, there was the intention to present the three programme courses in a way that made them attractive to join both by men and women. New technical material was to be introduced in the texts with a view to widen the scope of the courses and thus make them even more attractive for the learners.

The revision of curriculum and textbooks was carried out during 1988 and 1989. In the course of the work a number of workshops were organized where experts from several institutions within the field of education were engaged. Members of the Women Expert Group took part in all major activities during this period. Several meeting and discussion sessions were held to reach consensus about the final version of the books.

At the outset, the suggested revision of books along the lines indicated above met with some resistance at the Ministry. During the initial stages of planning for the post literacy programme, no female planner had been consulted and the traditional role and status of women were not questioned. When the idea of rewriting the books was first brought up, traditional prejudices and male chauvinism were voiced and some misgiving expressed that the new gender-oriented approach would frighten off potential participants. However, in the course of the revision work, understanding and appreciation about gender issues have gradually increased and consensus has been reached to a very large extent among the staff concerned. The task of revision has been exacting and time-consuming but also an interesting and rewarding experience for everyone who has been involved in this process.

## Writer's Guide

When the writers were given the task to rewrite the textbooks they were faced with the problem that no one had any experience of how to introduce equality and gender aspects into books dealing with subjects like agriculture, carpentry or child care. The authors had to bring the new attitudes into the text in a natural way without losing sight of the factual information which had to be presented to the readers. The books were to be written in a way that would help to break down prejudices against women and make other members of the household aware of women's problems. A number of recommendations were eventually formulated as a guidance for the writers. A few pertinent questions were posed as a point of departure:

- Is there in this text anything which introduces new ideas about what women can do and should be allowed to do?
- Is there anything that could be added to the text to emphasize the above?
- Is there in this text anything which mirrors old prejudices against women? If yes, how can this be changed?
- Will readers of this text, women and men, feel encouraged to try out new ideas?

It was also pointed out that special attention should be paid to choice of pictures in the text and that exercises should be constructed in a way that they increased awareness about the problems women are facing and encouraged learners to seek new solutions for these.

## General Recommendations

The post-literacy textbooks ought to be important tools for promoting positive changes in the lives of the participants, women as well as men. Since the problem of discrimination against women has been identified and the negative consequences of such practice for the society are known, special attention should be paid to this issue when writing the books. It is recommended that books are written in a way that readers become aware of the major problems women are facing and are encouraged to change practices which are adverse to equity.

It should be clearly stated in the texts that work in the household, and services rendered by women in order to make life in the family safe and comfortable, have economic value in the same way as for instance production of cash. This could conveniently be covered in the subject of family management, which should include financial planning and budgeting, time planning, and resource allocation. Family management should be taught in all three courses.

The textbooks of the three courses should be written in a way that helps to sensitize participants about the negative effects of patriarchal ideology. Readers should be encouraged to discuss and analyze daily life experiences and to identify mechanisms which influence their own behaviour.

The whole community should eventually through the post literacy programme become sentisized about the necessity of sharing responsibilities and resources. Joint family management and decision-making should be advocated, and illustrated by examples in the texts. Community leaders should become aware of the need to give priority to village projects which decrease women's work load, e.g. day care centres, mills, wells etc. Men need such awareness in order to establish a more equal sharing of work. Women need it in order to conceptualize and analyze their own situation and to seek ways for improvement. Young people, finally, need to understand the problem in order to create a better functioning and more fair organization of the work when they establish their own households.

The issue of sexual division of labor should have priority. It is important that the texts do not perpetuate stereotyped gender roles, for instance by using words and expressions that are loaded with negative traditional values. Rather the content should be such that it helps to change gender roles and widens the scope of permissible behaviour for men and women. The textbook of each course should be written in such a way that it appeals to every reader, be it a man or a woman. In this way better understanding will be created about the real nature of what so far has been regarded as "men's work" and "women's work".

It should also be recognized in all texts that a household where there is no husband - whether the reason is that he is dead, has divorced his wife, or just deserted his family - do face special problems. The issue of ownership and control of resources should also be dealt with thoroughly. In all courses, common credit channels should be described and the procedure for dealing with them explained. Constraints for obtaining credit which relate to women specifically should be identified and solutions indicated.

The role of the Cooperative movement in rural development should be brought up and its relevancy for post literacy projects should be discussed. The curriculum should allow for local adaption of course content, and finally, efforts should be made to enrol both men and women in all courses.

## Specific Recommendations

*Agriculture*. Men and women should learn from the textbooks about their legal rights to own, use and control land, and how to exercise these rights. Traditional practices should also be described and the consequences of such practices for women and men analyzed. The text should be written in such a way that encourages readers to consider the local land situation, identify current problems and seek solutions. The issue of land should be introduced specifically in the agricultural textbooks, but there is also the need of supplementary readers on the subject.

Alternative ways of obtaining credit should be presented, together with suggestions about how individuals or groups could invest their surplus. Here concrete examples are required to illustrate the difference between making short and long term investments.

Farm management should be taught, including statistics and record keeping, land use, costing estimates, budgeting and marketing. Linked to this should be information about the nutritional consequences for the family of selected cropping pattern and how production resources are divided between food crops and cash crops. Different modes of control of produce should be presented and discussed.

Data from the Women Expert Group study (1987) indicate that the agricultural technology presented so far does not meet women's needs. More knowledge about food and vegetable crop production is required and new technology for processing and storage is needed. The text should, for instance discuss how the current use of small home-made hoes affects productivity and health of the user. It should be indicated that appropriate tools could be obtained through cooperation with the crafts centres. Such items are for instance watering cans, wheelbarrows and cooking and storage devices. It is necessary that Agricultural Extension becomes more involved in the programme and that special attention is paid to women's crops by extension officers. This should be discussed in the text.

***Home economics***. This subject has up to now been regarded as being of interest for women only. It is now the time to introduce new materials and thoughts which can help to break down the barriers and confinement of traditional gender roles. Such added subject matter content includes, for instance, family management and family life education. Family life education in particular, should be part and parcel of all adult education. Issues of family conflicts, its causes and methods of dealing with those should also be treated. This would require supplementary readers whose main thrust should, among other things, be to teach basic knowledge about prevention and treatment of common diseases, as well as how to administer first aid. This material should be written for a target group which consists of men and women, and the texts should show alternative models of gender relations based on cooperation and joint decision-making, and it should emphasize benefits of such practices. The course should prepare women for greater participation in community affairs and for leadership and the texts should provide examples of such situations.

Women's participation in the course should be stimulated by making the text content more relevant to their problems and interests. Various types of income generating projects should be presented. In this context credit facilities should be explored and special constraints for women identified and discussed. Existing local knowledge and traditional skills should be drawn on when income generating projects are to be launched. The relationship between nutritional status of the family and choice of cropping pattern in the household should be illustrated. Women's oppressive work load, as well as the negative consequences of it, should be treated in the text. Concrete suggestions about labor saving devices should also be introduced.

*Crafts*. The crafts curriculum should be written in a way that shows that both men and women can contribute within this field. Skills and techniques that are relevant and attractive to women should be included, especially skills which could lead to new types of income generating projects. Ways and means of obtaining credit should be explored. Special attention should be paid to women's opportunities to borrow money for commercial enterprises. In this context accounting and marketing should be taught, as well.

The crafts curriculum should also introduce and encourage production of technology which reduces the work load of participants and increases their productivity. Special attention should be paid to tools and equipment suitable for women. Such items could be fuel-saving stoves, hand milling machines, wheelbarrows, improved food storage utilities as in agriculture above. Obviously crafts as a subject within the adult education programme will deal with development of technical skills and thus often will be linked to changes of work procedures. Such changes, of course, concern both women and men and this fact should be reflected in the text. Planning for the use of new techniques should be included in family management, and the consequences of these techniques for each of the family mem-bers should be assessed. For instance, in cases where the man becomes so much involved in a carpentry project that he cannot continue to contribute to the work on the land, the woman should be given access to funds to hire labor to replace him.

## Towards Tomorrow

There seems to be a general belief that literacy campaigns and post literacy programmes will automatically lead to a dynamic process of development which will influence and improve life for those who take part in the activities. Certainly there have been some successful campaigns to prove the case, though there is ample evidence to the contrary as well. Where women are concerned however, the benefits are not that easy to identify. For one thing, women's subordinate standing and lack of decision power make it difficult for them to draw on the resources of a programme.

There is a general feeling that if women could become economically independent, their status and life situation would improve. For that reason many donors advocate and support income generating projects, often combined with literacy training, as the best approach for assisting women. It is true that a well organized and properly implemented project of that kind can greatly improve the situation of the participants. A prerequisite is that they have access to necessary funding, which means credit. But in most developing countries women have little opportunity to borrow money, or if they can do it, the use of the money is controlled by husbands or male relatives. Credit institutions which are serving women are urgently needed in the developing world.

Another word of caution is required before we settle for income generating projects as the answer to women's needs. It is not uncommon that women are encouraged to start such projects without being fully aware of the amount of labor required. Many women spend endless hours toiling in vegetable gardens or at handicraft centres for a very poor amount of extra income. One reason for this could be that "women's projects" are frequently located within a low status and low income sector, e.g. the domestic field. If we want women to truly benefit from projects we will have to see to it that they are exposed to alternative project ideas. Such alternatives could for instance be found within the crafts course in the Tanzanian post-literacy programme.

Projects which are expected to generate income usually contain a component of training. Again taking the Tanzanian post-literacy programme as an example, the idea is that the courses should provide new skills and knowledge which eventually will enable the participants to start a project to earn money. Training of teachers or instructors for adult education usually involves a brief course in the subject matter, perhaps combined with basic pedagogic instruction. This is not enough, however. It is necessary that the organizers also provide training in how to put across new attitudes, values, and how to make the learners question unequal practices and see the benefits of other solutions.

It must be clearly understood that such training should not only be given to teachers dealing with training of women, but to all teachers and instructors involved in adult education, both at micro and macro levels. Special seminars and courses on the role of education as an equaliser should be arranged continuously in every developing country.

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## Chapter Seven

# Women in Literacy Programmes and Underdevelopment
## The Case of Tanzania

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### Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to examine literacy programmes and their relation to development of women in Tanzania. The paper looks at literacy as an aspect of language communication which incorporates time and space in the dissemination of information. Perhaps the most difficult problem is not what is meant by literacy but rather our perception on the position of women in society and what constitutes development in this context. However it is not enough to show the relationship between literacy and womens' development. There is need to study the social formation of a particular country or region in order to establish the subjective and objective factors for development and how literacy can contribute to it. In other words there is need to constantly keep on asking: "Under what conditions or combination of factors can the position of women be improved?"

In this paper, I will comment on the issue of literacy and development, then give an analysis of the system of underdevelopment and the situation of women in this system, and finally examine literacy programmes and women's struggle against oppression and underdevelopment.

## Literacy and Development

Many social scientists agree that language and thought are crucial elements which distinguish man from all other animals. It is important to note that these two elements are inter-related and are mutually reinforcing. The task of the social scientist is to find out how a change in one of the elements brings changes in the others and in society as a whole.

Of the four skills in languages, namely: listening, speaking, reading and writing, literacy deals with the last two skills. Reading and writing are accorded much higher status than the first two as they incorporate the aspect of time and space in communication which can reach a wider audience and at different times without distorting the message. But the question still asked by many is: "why literacy?".

The answers given for this question can be divided into two main positions. The first position is held by those who see various justifications for literacy (see Lind 1988:14). In an International Seminar on Literacy, the following declaration was adopted:

1. Literacy is a basic human right for the advancement of all people around the world.
2. Illiteracy is a major problem not only in developing countries, but in industrialized countries as well. It is a sign, an effect, of poverty, unemployment, alienation and oppressive social structures. It affects both individuals and communities.
3. Literacy is more than the ability to read, write and compute. The demands created by advancing technology require increased levels of knowledge skills and understanding and ability necessary to improve living and working conditions.

4. Literacy is a way of building community. It promotes social and individual change, equality of opportunity and global understanding.
5. Justice demands that the problem of illiteracy must be attacked in a world that possesses all the means and resources to do so.

The second position on literacy is mainly based on the views of the illiterates themselves. The peasants of West Bengal (India) illustrate the thinking of many other illiterates in the world:

> What kind of people are we?
> We are poor, very poor
> But we are not stupid.
> That is why, despite our illiteracy,
> We still exist.
> But we have to know
> Why we should become literate.
> (Bengal Peasants 1987:18-19)

When illiterates fail to turn up for literacy classes, some adult educators blame them for their ignorance and apathy, while others think of various ways of motivating them so that they can attend classes. One of the suggested ways is to gear literacy programmes to the needs of the illiterates. But these efforts have different perspectives, strategies and methods, and in some cases can lead to conflicts between the practitioners and the illiterates, the aid donors and the recipients, and the leaders and the led. Although people talk of the importance of preparing learner-oriented literacy programmes, the definitions, perceptions and methods remain those of the practitioner. Literacy for adults is conceived in the same way it was taught to school children. The idea of adults communicating in a community does not come in and that literacy will enable them to handle more information for their own interest does not feature in the programmes.

Some adult educators have gone further into what could be called "literacy of adults, for adults and by adults". In many parts of the world, adult educators have tried to develop with the learners new literacy programmes which incorporate the concepts of grassroots movement, development discourse and popular education (Prauli 1986:29-40). In such cases, literacy programmes are developed by the learners, bringing in their social, political and economic experiences and trying to find out how their various problems can be solved. Thus literacy is a tool which enables them to communicate with other adults about their various experiences and views. The approach is very democratic and should turn learners into makers of their own history. But it is not clear as to what extent this can develop since much depends on the existing power structures in society. In some societies this would be welcome as there were some movements working for the liberation of the exploited and oppressed, and literacy groups would be part of the movement. In some other places it would face opposition right from the start. Issues like womens' liberation for instance, often assume political dimensions, particularly where the gender issues in question are related to religious and economic practices which are accepted and promoted by those in power.

## System of Underdevelopment in Tanzania

In order to understand the plight of women in Tanzania, one needs to look at the history of the country and see how its economic, social and political structure has developed, and the role women have played in the reproduction of that system.

Before the advent of colonialism in Tanzania in the 19th century there were many but small societies at different levels of development. They provide good examples of how early agricultural and pastoral societies struggled against nature and other social groups to get access to the available natural resources and the surplus they produced. Due to low level of skills and means of labor, development was so much influenced by the weather conditions. Those in fertile areas with adequate rainfall were able to develop their agriculture faster and produced surplus produce that was subsequently used for the development and consolidation of social and political institutions existing in those societies. For the groups that lived in the dry and relatively infertile areas, such pace of consolidation and development was not possible.

Later in the 19th century, the colonialists came in search of cheap raw materials, markets for manufactured goods and investment outlets. The German colonial government (1885-1914), established a plantation economy for European settlers and a peasant economy for Africans. The plantation economy demanded labor from different parts of the country. This led to the creation of labor reserves or "labor exporting" regions in the country. The coffee, sisal, tea or maize plantations were concentrated in Tanga, Kilimanjaro, Arusha, Morogoro, Iringa and Mbeya regions, and labourers to these plantations came from Ruvuma, Mtwara, Lindi, Kigoma, Tabora, Singida and Dodoma regions. Later, when African peasants from the agriculturally more favourable areas began to commercialize their agriculture, those in the labor exporting regions tended to stagnate or even retrogress (Iliffe 1979:151).

In the meantime, various steps were taken by the German and later the British colonial government, to ensure that the peasants continued to produce cash crops for export. These steps included institution of "orders and rules" by local governments, agricultural extension service, establishment of cooperative societies, encouragement to progressive farmers, and the improvement of the transport system (see Kweka 1987:34). Both the peasant and plantation economy therefore, gradually began to tie and link peasants and workers to the international capitalist economic system.

Employment in agriculture however, was not permanent and did not equip the workers with new production skills. Employment in the service sector on the other hand, differed from one occupation to another. Some jobs required initial training but provided permanent employment as in teaching and medicine. Others in the service sector did not require training in new skills and were temporary.

Those employed in the manufacturing and construction sector however, provided the opportunity to acquire new skills which could enable the workers to look for permanent employment.

In 1951, out of 417,000 adult employees only five per cent were adult females. They were also mainly employed in agriculture. This small percentage of women employees is indicative of the position of women in the family. Women were involved in the household activities and were not regarded by men as people to be turned into "workers". This situation has not changed much in spite of the struggle for equality between men and women.

## The Situation of Women in Tanzania

Just like many developing countries, the situation of women in Tanzania is a very complicated one. The socio-economic conditions under which they operate however, vary from one community to another. It is important to note this in order to avoid over generalizations which tend to portray women as a homogeneous group suffering every time and every where in the same way. In Tanzania for instance, it is mentioned that women work for 16 hours every day, they walk 7,000 kilometres per year fetching firewood and water, they look after children every day, and they do not have a say over what they produce. This is not true for all women, and in fact a movement that treats women as if they had the same problems, ends up keeping many of them away.

Both social and even class differentiation do exist among women themselves. One could talk of women as local bourgeoisie, petty-bourgeoisie, workers and peasants. In marriage especially, they usually pair with men of the same class or what they consider to be higher than their own. Even in these social classes one would find differences in income and education. These social differences among women has been a source of misunderstanding in both women organizations and in the day to day struggle for equality and respect between women and men.

In our discussion we shall not dwell on the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie women since most of them if not all had access to formal schooling and will not be found in literacy programmes. About 97 per cent of the economically active women, are, involved in subsistence agriculture (see Mbilinyi 1985:17).

Oppression and exploitation of women peasants and workers can be analysed both at the international level and at the local level. At the international level the woman peasant is operating in a neo-colonial situation just like her male peasant partner. They do not make a decision on what to grow since this has already been done through the international division of labour. They will thus grow coffee, tea, maize, tobacco or cashewnut. The neo-colonial state sees that this is done and further reinforces it by providing literacy programmes which show how those crops should be grown. The peasants are "price takers" for the crops they grow as well as the goods sold to them. As a reaction to this peasants try to produce what they can sell at the local markets where they see possibilities of better prices. In Kilimanjaro, for example, peasants prefer to produce vegetables and milk for the local market instead of coffee. But the government official in Kilimanjaro must ensure that more coffee is produced for export. Both women and men peasants know that they cannot live on the sales from coffee. They must grow their own food and other cash crops to augment their income. They know that prices of imported or even locally manufactured goods are rising and that their living conditions are deteriorating in spite of the hard work in the farms. The peasant, both woman and man, is thinking of food, shelter and clothing; and both rejoice at the right of second-hand clothes or *mitumba*. Most peasants throughout the country are thinking of basic economic needs and as time passes they see themselves satisfying their needs less and less. At the local level and in varying degrees women peasants and workers are further oppressed and exploited by men in the family and work place. But this does not mean that women have not struggled against exploitation and oppression. Various methods have been devised by women to defend their interests, and the situation has kept on changing for the better.

In many pre-capitalist societies, marriage was regarded as an institution for the recruitment of labor, that is, some one to work in the farm and in the kitchen. A man looking for a woman to marry would without shame ask the prospective father-in-law for a "hoe", someone to make a fire, or someone to do any household activity designated for women. Oral traditions in many parts of the country are rich in this and continue to be used in some societies. The woman was married to a man who owned the means of production and shelter. A man married more wives if he had a large piece of land or many cows which required their labor. The women occupied an inferior position in the family, and the social ideas and institutions which developed, justified that position.

The control of women was centred on issues like domestic labor, sexuality, decision making, sexual harassment and restriction of movement of women (see for instance, Mascarenhas & Mbilinyi 1983). This was followed by the distribution and consumption of the family produce and it was in this way that the women were most severely exploited. There are cases were women as individuals or a group have struggled against these practices. However it is evident that the poorer they are, the more difficult it is, to struggle for equality and respect. In Tanzania the struggle against exploitation and oppression of women is a major issue which has been dealt with in party politics. The Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), 1954-1977, struggled for freedom, equality and respect of all citizens regardless of sex, race and religion. Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) since 1977, has promoted the same principles. The Party manifesto (1977:1), states:

A. That all human beings are equal.

B. That every individual has a right to dignity and respect as a human being.

C. That socialism and self-reliance are the only ways of building a society of free and equal citizens.

The then president and chairman of the ruling party (TANU and then CCM) discussed the question of women oppression in traditional society and concluded:

> This is certainly inconsistent with our socialist conception of the equality of all human beings and the right of all to live in such security and freedom as is consistent with equal security and freedom for all others. If we want our country to make full and quick progress now, it is essential that our women live in terms of full equality with their fellow citizens who are men (Nyerere 1967:3).

With this backing from the party and government, the Union of Women in Tanzania (UWT), has tried to organize women in work places and in the villages to discuss various gender issues and struggle for equality. It must be pointed out that women through their organisation, have achieved some of their objectives on equality in areas like: conditions of employment of women workers, their involvement in politics and in the distribution of social services. However the existence of customary law, traditional values and some religions beliefs have denied women freedom and equality in marriage in some communities. The family, particularly the poor peasant family, still deny women freedom and equality.

## Literacy Programmes

Tanzania has had several shifts of emphasis on the objectives of literacy programmes. In the 1950s the British colonial, government, operating within the ambit of the modernisation theory, put emphasis on teaching peasants how to improve their life. These programmes combined literacy, womens education, and community self-help projects. Women's education was centred on domestic labor of women such as cookery, needlework, house-keeping and gardening. These literacy and women's education classes attracted many students particularly in central Tanzania (see Richards 1960:50-55). However these classes were discontinued when the participants realised that they could not put to practice what they were taught due to the low level of material well-being in their area.

In the 1960s, former President Nyerere shared the views of the World Bank and UNESCO on adult education and national development. Adult education would change the attitudes of adults towards development, and with the training in modern agricultural techniques national development would take place sooner (Nyerere 1964:ix-xii). The literacy programmes emphasized increased production of export crops and hence the need for a "progressive farmer". The concern for increased production of cash crops was later in the 1960s promoted by the UNDP/UNESCO functional literacy project in the area around Lake Victoria.

## Adult Education and National Literacy Efforts

The year 1970 was declared "Adult Education Year" and the objectives of adult education were stated as:

a) to shake ourselves out of a resignation to the kind of life Tanzania people have lived for centuries past;

b) to teach us how to improve our lives; and

c) to have every one understand our national policies of socialism and self-reliance (Nyerere 1967).

The Ministry of Education was given the responsibility of coordinating adult education programme among the peasants. The ministry prepared syllabi for various subjects which could be taught to adults and school teachers were required to submit periodic reports saying how many adults were doing the following subjects: political education, agriculture, health, literacy, domestic science, typing and vocational training.

In the following year, there was a shift of emphasis to literacy. The reasons for this shift are not quite clear. Some have related this to the political needs of having literate members for socialist transformation (MNE 1972; Hall 1975; Kassam 1978). Others have tended to relate it to the extension of the UNDE/UNESCO Functional Literacy Project with its emphasis on increased production of cash crops. The Ministry of Education with the support of SIDA prepared literacy primers on: cotton, maize, rice, banana, coconut, cashewnut, tea, tobacco, cattle and fishing. One primer was prepared on the party philosophy of socialism and self-reliance. In practice, the emphasis was on the acquisition of literacy skills rather than on what was taught and how.

In order to know how many people had acquired literacy skills the Ministry of Education instituted a national literacy examination from 1975. Performance in the examination was ranked from Level I to Level IV. Those who reached Level IV were regarded as functionally literate but in some other places those who reached Level III were also included. These figures were compiled for the whole country to show the rate of illiteracy in the country (see Table 7:1). The figures show that there were more women than men who were illiterate from the beginning. This was a reflection of the provision of school education which favoured men.

Table 7:1 Rate of Illiteracy in Tanzania: 1968-86 (per cent).

| Year | Men | Women | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1967 | 56 | 80 | 67 |
| 1975 | 34 | 44 | 39 |
| 1977 | - | - | 27 |
| 1981 | 15 | 27 | 21 |
| 1983 | 10 | 21 | 15 |
| 1986 | 7.1 | 12 | 9.5 |

*Source*: Ministry of Education, Adult Educ., 1986.

A lot of work done in the early 1970s to reduce the rate of illiteracy from 67 per cent in 1967 to 39 per cent in 1975. Unfortunately the studies which have been carried out in the field show that the official figures are exaggerated (see for example Kweka 1987). Another study going on in 1989 in different parts of the country reveal the same story. The literacy program was off and on, and it was examination centred. Perhaps without the national literacy examination no classes would have been established. These studies have also confirmed that the majority of those who really attended literacy classes were women and that they were concentrated at Level I and Level II. It is clear that the mobilization and enthusiasm that went with the policy of socialism and self-reliance has waned.

The literacy programme did not achieve much in many parts of Tanzania. The literacy primers used provided, in the official view, very useful knowledge and skills to small-holder peasants. The primers on different crops cover the following topics:

- clearing the farm, cultivating (using hand hoe, ox-plough, and tractor),
- contours, terraces and ridges,
- better seeds,
- planting season,
- spacing, thinning, weeding,
- manure/fertilizer,
- insects and insecticides,
- harvesting,
- crop rotation,
- preservation of food crops,
- where to sell cash crops; and,
- how to spend money.

In some places this was not new knowledge. The agricultural extension officer, the politicians and the radio provided similar information. At the same time peasants learned from other peasants. The primers did not include all that the peasant would like to know about their crops, for example the system of dependence and exploitation.

The literacy programme was a clear case of a top-down planning. It did not put into consideration the learners perceptions, motives, desires and constraints. Indeed the learners were reacting like the West Bengal peasants who did not see why they should join literacy classes. There was a need for democratization of the literacy classes.

However one could look at the acquisition of literacy skills and show how this could be applied to other different situations. This has in fact been the position held by many educators. But under what conditions does this take place? Here one needs to examine the communication system in the area or even the need for increased communication which would include literacy skills. For example in Tanzania the need for literacy in religious worship was felt by some peasants since it would not be possible to memorize the whole Koran or Bible. The application of literacy skills to other situations only works in a literate environment. In Tanzania the efforts to establish a literate environment for the peasants have included establishing rural libraries, zonal newsletters/newspapers for new literates and even printing special page for new literates in the Swahili daily "Uhuru". These efforts were based on SIDA support. The rural libraries were not functioning (see Singe, Bangaya and Kweka 1986). The zonal newspapers were operating in some places and this could be increased and better organized to include more topics of interest to the peasants.

## The Challenge of Sustaining Literacy

The deterioration of the performance of the economy has affected literacy to a great extent. The rising prices of newspapers have kept many new literates away. This also means that not many people will be able to buy books. The difficult economic conditions also affected people's perception about literacy, education and development. One woman in Dar es Salaam aptly remarked, "Even the educated ones have similar problems like the illiterate". Another wondered how would she dare buy a newspaper when her children had nothing to eat. This underscores the point that poverty erodes the literacy environment.

Many people, faced with the struggle for survival, concentrated their efforts on how to satisfy their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. Even in places like Kilimanjaro, which was regarded as one of the highly developed parts of the country, people were worried about the economic situation and some were thinking of uprooting their coffee trees so that they could grow vegetables which had better prices in the local markets. There was no relevant literature on how to cope with the situation, nor was it easy to come up with one. Even if there was, not many would be able to afford books and hence the word of mouth still predominates.

## Gender: The Missing Entry

Women in literacy programmes have despaired. In the first place the primers used are not on women issues. They do not mention about domestic labor of women and the work load in the family. Issues like sexuality, decision-making, sexual harassment and restriction of movement of women have not found a place in the literature for peasant women. Exploitation of women and children by men needs to be documented with examples from different parts of the country. One serious problems is that with the increase in economic hardships men increase their exploitation and oppression of women and children.

One immediate recommendation should be to increase research, information and literature on equality and respect in particular for the peasant women who constitute about 97 per cent of economically active women population. The Organization of Women in Tanzania should be given the material support to carry out this task. At the same time literacy primers on the natural and social constraints to their development should be prepared and produced with full participation of peasants.

## Concluding remarks

The situation of women in Tanzania is complex. Tanzanian women cannot fight it alone. They need the help of other women from other parts of the world. They need the support of all progressive forces, men and women, wherever they are. Raising the consciousness of women through literature is only the first step. Ways of changing the situation, including developing the productive forces, must be sought. In a situation of underdevelopment this may not work and therefore women in countries like Tanzania, need to cooperate with their men in bringing about a new international economic order which ensures economic and social development in their own countries. Literacy can contribute a lot to this provided it is developed in the interests of the oppressed and exploited women peasants.

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## Chapter Eight

# Then National Literacy Programme and Gender Issues

## The Case of Botswana

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### General Background

The emergence of the National Literacy Programme dates back to 1977 when the National Commission on Education in Botswana made a recommendation that priority be given to adult literacy. The Department of Non-Formal Education, set up in 1979 in the Ministry of Education, first undertook pilot projects which later led to the adoption of a policy for a national programme to eradicate illiteracy. In 1981 the nationwide programme was officially launched. The policy document set as its target:

> To enable 250,000 presently illiterate men and women and youth to become literate in Botswana over the six years 1980-85.

It defined literacy as the ability to comprehend those written communications and simple computations which are necessary in daily life.

At ten years old today, the National Literacy Programme (NLP) is the biggest single effort in non-formal education since Botswana became a sovereign state. Altogether, at least 200,000 men, women and youth are participating in it. According to an assessment made by Coles (1988), no other branch of adult education has achieved such phenomenal growth in so short a time. This has raised a number of important questions, among them, "Why literacy now and not earlier? If literacy is that important to development, why was it neglected till 1981?

This paper takes the political economy approach in analyzing the organic relationship between education and the political and economic matrix in a given social formation principally because education as a subsystem of the whole societal system is not autonomous but is a reflection of the political and economic structure of society. The paper examines the national pattern of capitalist accumulation within the context of the international division of labor and attempts to show how this relationship leads to certain kinds of development and social institutions and subsystems like education.

It is worthwhile to mention that Botswana was incorporated into world economy at two levels: as a producer of beef to the European markets, and as a labor reserve for capitalist enterprises in South Africa. The incorporation, which started in the late 19th century is today further reinforced by the discovery of various mineral resources in the 1970s.

All these economic activities did not require skilled labor, and this is the point of departure in understanding why literacy is a "late starter" in Botswana. As pointed out in Gaborone (1988), since the colonial period till the seventies, Botswana's "development" had taken place, and would continue, without a fully literate adult population. The poor illiterate peasant and labor unemployed has always been marginal to the whole development process. While these classes were neither primal nor central to the spectacuiar economic growth of Botswana, their continued political cooperation was important. Such cooperation was mediated through adult education (see Gaborone 1987).

The political economy perspective posits that adult education programmes initiated by the state - as in the case of Botswana NLP will therefore be oriented at both political and economic levels towards producing differentiated skills and capabilities and ideological forms and practices required by the dominant mode of production. Further adult education in a capitalist social formation such as in Botswana, reflects the interests of the ruling alliance, by developing and legitimating the social division of labor and power relations in the capitalist mode of production.

In the case of Botswana, the overall development strategy of intervention to promote capitalist accumulation and to provide social welfare programmes which ameliorate the resultant inequalities, is reflected in the specific strategy of the education sector. Here the stated goals of the state are that education should meet the manpower needs of the economy; and that there should be greater and more equal access to educational opportunities. Adult or non-formal education in general, and literacy in particular, is seen as a vehicle towards both these goals (see GOB National Development Plan 1985:123-58).

But even at this level of policy declaration the NLP is characterized by vague objectives. Precisely because such vague objectives lack the specific achievement indicators, it has made it difficult for both the evaluators on the one hand, and the intended beneficiaries of the NLP on the other, to critically assess the degree of success of the programme.

As Gaborone (*et al.* 1988:353) point out, earlier discussions particularly during 1979 on the question of "why literacy" got the simplistic argument that the need was an "assertion based on moral, social and economic grounds", as a Ministry of Education memorandum of the time put it. The purpose of the project or programme was asserted as a "good thing ", and in general terms, and literacy was justified as an end in itself rather than in terms of literacy as a potential that enables and contributes to individual, community and national development. Coles expressing the official view correctly points out that "for DNFE the priority national task was clear: it was to make it's contribution towards the creation of a literate society. This was also the view of its parent Ministry and of government (Coles 1988:117).

Despite the stated commitment to the national objective of social justice in terms of increasing educational opportunities for the disadvantaged however, the overall thrust of the curriculum of the NLP reinforces rather than challenges the legitimacy of the status quo. Of particular interest to this paper is the mediation of the NLP in the sexual division of labor and patriarchal relations; and it is to this, we now turn.

### NLP, the Sexual Division of Labor and Patriarchal Relations

The participation in the NLP indicates that the majority of learners in the literacy groups are women and girls (Sebolai 1989:9).

Table 8:1 Literacy Participation by Sex: 1987 and 1988 (Botswana).

| Year | Participants | |
|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female |
| 1987 | 7,746 | 13,173 |
| 1988 | 10,105 | 16,095 |

*Source*: Sebolai, 1989:1

Sebolai (1989) wondered whether this higher proportion of female participation suggests that illiteracy is a pre-dominantly female handicap or whether the non-participation on the part of the males could be attributed to inertia or lack of enthusiasm. This paper seeks to explain this numerical preponderance of women over men from the political economic perspective.

Statistics show that NLP attracts more women than men (65.1 per cent of the evaluation sample). During the mobilisation phase for both the pilot and actual NLP, the need for literacy was justified on the basis that women would use their newly acquired writing skills to write letters to their relatives, husbands and/or partners in the South Africa migratory labor. The curriculum of the NLP does not challenge the exploitative nature of the South Africa migrant labor system with low pays and also dividing families (see Gaborone 1986). Indeed a literacy initiative whose justification anchors on "correspondence with partners or relatives" in South Africa rather than helping to create awareness of existing opportunities and societal problems reinforces the definition of women to men, as mothers and wives or girlfriends rather than as workers and citizens; and this institutionalises and reproduces women's economic dependence on men and also reproduces patriarchal relations. It also covertly helps to reproduce labor system at the household level. It is suggested that the home economics course in the NLP in particular, when examined closely, typically reproduces sexual division of labor and patriarchal relations in the households of those participating.

## NLP Home Economics and Gender Issues

According to the Botswana National Development Plan (1970-75:12), the official national view of womens' role was clearly spelt out:

> A large number of women . . . compose roughly half the increase of annual labor force, they will assume the natural role of home-makers

This view is reinforced and implemented via the NLP strategy, and pursued as the justification for extending adult education activities to women, who, as stated earlier, were already well defined as the major component of the target group for the literacy programme. There is no question as to the patriarchal assumptions in both the intention and attitude of the state (see also Thompson 1983:68; Gaborone 1986).

## Income Generating Activities and Gender Issues

Income Generating Projects (IGPs) are a constituent component of the NLP. As the current National Development Plan (1985-91:158) points out:

> Government recognises that in the long run, the only way to secure a sustained increase in poor people's standard of living is to provide them with more productive work . . . . Government must aim at maximising the growth of income generating opportunities for people in the rural areas.

One specific objective of the NLP is to:

> Expand activities beyond reading, writing and numeracy. The needs of rural communities, in terms of skills required for income generating activities, will form the basis for this expansion.

Examples of such IGPs are the Mogobane Bakery Project and the Kang School Uniforms Project (Sebolai 1989:16). Although no evaluation of these IGPs have ever been undertaken, experience shows that they are facing many "teething" problems ranging from poor extension inputs, lack of funds, lack of transport to deliver produce to markets, to more technical problems of project designs, project viability and self-sustainability.

## Conclusion

At the outset we posed the question "why literacy now and not earlier" followed subsequently by another question "why does NLP attract more women than men? The NLP was initiated into the

1980s because Botswana's economic growth was achieved without a literate adult population as the prime movers. In other words, capitalist accumulation at the levels of commoditisation of beef, the biological and social reproduction of cheap abundant labor for capitalist enterprises in South Africa, and later mining and exportation of raw minerals from Botswana to Europe, were all achieved without skilled, educated labor force. The position and role of Botswana's economy in the international division of labor did not and does not require skilled educated labor force. But why literacy now?

Thanks to Botswana's spectacular economic growth, the ruling bloc of dominant classes has improved its own situation significantly in this situation of economic expansion. It has used its control of the state to pursue policies which have advanced its material economic interests, following a development strategy which has used state interventions to provide the conditions for private enterprise and foreign investment (National Development Plan 1985:54,242). But the ruling bloc has also used the available surplus to maintain the standard of living of other classes, in particular the working class in the formal sector, for whom there is a minimum wage and protection from inflation through annual increases (Gaborone *et al*. 1988:359).

However not all classes have benefited equally from the growth in GNP. The situation of the disadvantaged in both the rural and urban areas has worsened in the post-independence period, as conceded to even by the government (National Development Plan 1985:21), that the majority of Botswana's households are indeed, poor. But as Gaborone (1988:359) also points out, revenues accruing to the state have been used to provide basic social services on a large scale, for example in the health and education sectors. In the face of growing economic inequalities, the NLP as well as other welfare services have, indeed served to reduce possible social tensions.

As far as the contents of the NLP is concerned, it was clear from the very beginning that the primers were designed with women participants in mind, as duly reflected in Home Economics course.

The content of the Home Economics course, as with other adult education programmes in Botswana reveals the class positions and roles of the differing categories of classes in the international division of labor, whether as mothers, (producers of labor), or as migrant workers for South African enterprises. In the NLP it can be concluded that the literacy campaign attracts women and youth rather than men for social rather than for economic reasons. Useful knowledge for women in the home economics was defined in terms of domestic utility based on patriarchal assumptions about domestic labor. This has severely circumscribed women's educational and employment opportunities (Thompson 1983:74).

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# Chapter Nine

## Women and Literacy:
## The Sri Lanka Experience

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### The Conceptual Framework

The concept of literacy as a basic human right and need has gained recognition since the mid-1950s in both international declarations and in national constitutions. An aspect of changing perspectives on literacy has been the popularization of "functional literacy" which is concerned with the integration of literacy in multifaceted programmes to increase the social and economic effectiveness of the individual and to improve the living standards of families. These changes have been reflected in different nuances in the UNESCO definition of literacy, which in 1958 was limited to ability to read and write, and which went on in 1978 to underscore the ability to use the 3Rs for the benefit of the individual and the community.

This overview uses quantitative data from official statistics and from surveys that are based mainly on the conventional parameters of literacy, that is, the ability to read and write, in order to identify trends and progress made in establishing the status of female literacy in Sri Lanka. The gender dimensions of the literacy situation are largely the outcome of gender role assumptions. These assumptions are, in turn, associated with the gender division of labor. The debate as to whether literacy is essential for domestic tasks such as the preparation of meals and fetching water and fuel for instance, is typical to the assumptions underlying gender division of labor. On the other hand, parental perceptions of the value of literacy for their daughters, in particular, of the instrumental value of education, have often determined the access of women to literacy and to educational opportunity (Acharya & Lyn 1980; Hassan 1980; FREPD 1983; CENWOR 1987).

In recent years impetus has been given to the promotion of female literacy by the perceived relationship between the literacy status of women and several indicators of the quality of life of families and the individual status of women. It has been pointed out that in societies with rising female literacy rates, family size has declined, family health, especially the survival and health of children, as well as the economic productivity of women has improved. Women have been seen to participate more actively in economic and social life, to exhibit more decision-making power within the family, more equitable gender relations and to have gained more self confidence (Smock 1981; FREPD 1983).

While these findings may vary in degrees from one society to another, gender has emerged as an important factor in determining both the 'life chances' of women and national progress through access to literacy and/or education. It may be inferred that a dual relationship exists, and that while literacy is perceived to be important for individual and national development, women's literacy status is influenced by the interplay of several factors such as national policies and provision of facilities as well as socio-cultural attitudes and economic constraints that affect utilization of opportunities.

## Literacy Diffusion Patterns in Sri Lanka

The historical context is crucial to understanding the current literacy situation in Sri Lanka. While modern educational institutions were introduced in the nineteenth century under the British colonial administration, colonial educational policies also helped to create regional, ethnic, socio-economic and gender inequalities in access to education and subsequently to literacy. With universal franchise in 1931 and the transfer of power to local policy makers, an overriding concern was the reduction of socio-economic inequalities through education (see Sessional Paper 1943 "Report of the Special Committee on Education"). Consequently free primary, secondary and tertiary including university education was introduced in 1945 and other incentives such as scholarships, free textbooks and midday meals introduced over the years.

Literacy *per se* has not been an important explicit objective of policies in Sri Lanka, but since literacy reflects past and present educational opportunities, improvement in literacy levels has followed closely behind rising education participation rates. On the other hand, the Constitution of Sri Lanka of 1978 has brought into the focus of policy goals, elements of the wider international concern. Article 27:2 of the Directives of State Policy vows "the complete eradication of illiteracy and the assurance to all persons of the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels". Legislation to enforce compulsory attendance even in primary grades however, has been a non-issue in the perceptions of policy makers. It is a moot point whether the goal of universal literacy is perceived as an objective both in operational terms and in overt strategies.

On the other hand, positive educational policies have had a continuous impact on literacy levels. At the beginning of the century, 34.7 per cent of the male population and 6.9 per cent of the female population were literate in Sri Lanka (Census 1901). These percentages had increased to 56.3 per cent and 21.2 per cent respectively in the last decade of direct colonial rule, though the promotion of elementary education in the local languages, particularly in the south-west and north of the island in urban centres (Census 1921). As educational opportunity became a focal point of policy in the thirties and forties, male and female literacy rates increased to 76.5 per cent and 46.2 per cent respectively (Census 1946).

A striking feature in the "post free education" decades has been not merely rising literacy rates but also the narrowing gender gap that distinguishes the Sri Lankan situation from that of other countries in the region. According to the national census and national socio-economic surveys, male literacy rates rose steadily to 85.6 per cent in 1963, and after a 'plateau', rose again by the end of the seventies to around 90 per cent. Female literacy rates however increased at a more accelerated pace over the same period, from a situation in which just over half the population were illiterate in 1953 to 67 per cent in 1963 and to 82 per cent by the late seventies.

Table 9:1 Literacy by Sector and Sex (Sri Lanka)

| | Census 1946 | Census 1953 | Census 1963 | Census 1971 | CF + SE Survey 1978/9 | CF + SE Survey 1981/2 | Census 1981 | LF + CF Survey 1985/6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **All Island** | 62.8 | 69.0 | 76.8 | 78.5 | 86.2 | 85.4 | 86.5 | 84.2 |
| **Male** | 76.5 | 80.7 | 85.6 | 85.6 | 90.0 | 89.9 | 90.5 | 88.6 |
| **Female** | 46.2 | 55.5 | 67.1 | 70.9 | 81.9 | 81.1 | 82.8 | 80.0 |
| **Urban** | 76.2 | 82.6 | 87.7 | 86.2 | 90.7 | 89.7 | 93.3 | 89.1 |
| **Male** | 84.5 | 88.5 | 91.8 | 90.3 | 92.9 | 92.9 | 95.3 | 92.4 |
| **Female** | 65.7 | 74.1 | 82.7 | 81.5 | 88.7 | 89.8 | 91.0 | 86.1 |
| **Rural** | 60.1 | 66.4 | 70.1 | 76.2 | 87.3 | 86.0 | 84.5 | 84.6 |
| **Male** | 74.7 | 79.0 | 83.9 | 84.1 | 91.6 | 90.1 | 89.0 | 88.5 |
| **Female** | 43.0 | 52.4 | 63.6 | 67.9 | 83.2 | 82.1 | 79.9 | 80.7 |
| **Estate** | - | - | - | - | 65.6 | 64.8 | - | 59.4 |
| **Male** | - | - | - | - | 79.3 | 78.0 | - | 74.5 |
| **Female** | - | - | - | - | 52.1 | 52.6 | - | 45.9 |

Notes: *Population* = 5+ years. Estate sector is included as "rural" in census. *CF+SE survey* = Consumer Finances and Socio-Economic survey. *LF+SE survey* = Labour Force and Socio-Economic Survey, Department of Census and Statistics.

*Source*: Department of Census and Statistics, Central Bank of Ceylon

The gender gap had narrowed from around 30 percentage points through the first half of the century to 8 percentage points in the late seventies and in the eighties. It has been reduced in the urban sector from 20 percentage points to 4 to 6 points. Urban-rural disparities in literacy rates are however wider among women than among men (Table 9:1). There appears to have been stagnation in both male and female literacy rates during the last decades, and even a slight decline reported in the eighties, although it is not clear whether this decline reflects differences in survey methodology or economic constraints to educational participation in a context of widening income disparities juxtaposed with increased growth rates during this period (Consumer Finances and Socio-Economic Surveys 1978/79, 1981/82; Labor Force and Socio-Economic Survey 1985/86).

It can be seen from the data in Table 9:1, that the estate sector has been subsumed in the rural sector in national census data but had been identified as a separate sector in national socio-economic surveys. The finding of the Consumer Finances and Socio-Economic Surveys of the Central Bank and the Labor Force and Socio-Economic Survey of the Department of Census underscore the disadvantaged status of women in the estate sector with regard to literacy. Differences between rural female literacy rates and estate female literacy rates have been as wide as 30 percentage points in the mid eighties. The estate sector is a special problem in Sri Lanka. In its historical development as a separate economic and social enclave in which social development was subordinated to economic imperatives, educational opportunities were minimal and high female labor force participation rates without adequate child care facilities has been conducive to non-schooling on the part of girls. While the health situation of the estate population has improved significantly in response to positive policies since the nationalization of the plantations in the mid seventies, the educational status of the estate population has improved very slowly, resulting in low literacy levels among women.

A frequent criticism of official literacy statistics in Sri Lanka has been the simplistic and subjective assessment of literacy status reflected in reliance on verbal responses to questions by investigators. In 1988, the National Association for Total Education in Sri Lanka (NATE), supported by the Asia and Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) carried out a sample survey of eight districts using census blocks Anuradhapura, Badulla, Colombo, Kalutara, Matale, Moneragala, Nuwara Eliya and Puttalam. In view of the political unrest in parts of the country, the north (with generally high literacy rates) and the east and "deep" south (with low literacy rates) had to be excluded, but the plantation sector, the urban sector and the rural population are well represented in the sample. The survey instruments included exercises in reading and in writing to assess simple literacy as well as more complex exercises in the 3Rs that connoted a more meaningful level of functional literacy (Survey of Literacy, NATE 1989).

With regards to gender, data is available as yet only for "ability to read", "ability to write", and literacy (ability to read and write) at an elementary level. It is interesting to note that literacy rates of the population over 14 years, computed on the basis of data that appears to be more valid than affirmative or negative responses in census data, are only about 4 percentage points less than those in census data. The NATE Survey of eight districts reported an overall literacy rate of 82.4 per cent, a male literacy rate of 86.6 per cent and a female literacy rate of 78.1 per cent. Urban male and female literacy rates were computed to be 92.6 per cent and 87.0 per cent, rural male and female literacy rates 84.9 per cent and 77.4 per cent and estate male and female literacy rates 78.9 per cent and 53.4 per cent. National literacy rates of the population over 10 years at the 1981 Census were 86.5 per cent overall, 90.5 per cent (male) and 82.8 per cent (female), and 84.2 per cent, 88.6 per cent and 80.0 per cent respectively at the Labour Force and Socio-economic Survey in 1985/86. Urban male and female literacy rates at the 1981 Census were 95.3 per cent and 91.0 per cent and rural male and female literacy rates 89.0 per cent and 79.9 per cent (Table 9:1). The NATE Survey also computed overall rates for more complex skills, as reading official instructional materials (79.2 per cent) and writing private letters (78.6 per cent).

The evidence from all these surveys indicates that at least 80 per cent of the total population and 78 per cent of the female population in Sri Lanka are literate. Educational participation rates of 84.5 per cent (males) and 84.2 per cent (female) among the 5-9 age group and 83.7 per cent and 83.6 per cent in the 5-14 age group at the 1981 Census lend support to this conclusion. The literacy status of the Sri Lankan women is therefore high for an economically developing society. It ranks with that of women in South East Asian and East Asian countries such as the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Korea and Mongolia.

Table 9:2 Literacy by Age and Sex

| | Census 1946 | | Census 1963 | | Census 1971 | | Census 1981 | | Census 1985/86* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| 10-14 | 68.6 | 54.9 | 86.6 | 82.7 | 83.7 | 82.3 | 88.8 | 88.8 | 89.6 | 88.1 |
| 15-19 | 79.5 | 59.0 | 90.3 | 82.2 | 88.3 | 85.0 | 89.9 | 89.4 | 89.7 | 88.2 |
| 20-24 | 83.6 | 56.2 | 91.0 | 77.5 | 91.0 | 83.1 | 92.5 | 90.1 | 90.0 | 87.6 |
| 25-29 | 82.9 | 50.3 | 89.4 | 69.4 | 91.0 | 78.3 | 93.6 | 90.0 | 91.2 | 87.1 |
| 30-34 | 81.5 | 46.4 | 88.6 | 65.8 | 90.4 | 73.8 | 94.0 | 87.8 | 91.2 | 87.0 |
| 35-39 | 77.9 | 40.8 | 86.8 | 59.3 | 86.3 | 62.5 | 93.1 | 82.5 | 90.8 | 84.1 |
| 40-44 | 76.7 | 37.7 | 85.9 | 56.0 | 86.7 | 61.3 | 91.8 | 77.4 | 89.5 | 78.4 |
| 45-49 | 73.9 | 33.7 | 82.6 | 51.8 | 84.0 | 54.4 | 89.2 | 69.6 | 89.5 | 68.9 |
| 50-54 | 72.2 | 30.8 | 80.8 | 47.9 | 83.0 | 51.3 | 89.4 | 68.7 | 87.0 | 64.1 |
| 55-59 | 70.8 | 28.8 | 77.7 | 44.3 | 79.1 | 45.3 | 87.7 | 64.7 | 84.3 | 57.4 |
| 60-64 | 67.2 | 25.7 | 74.8 | 39.0 | 75.6 | 41.0 | 86.4 | 61.7 | 84.5 | 57.8 |
| 65-69 | 66.9 | 26.0 | 73.5 | 37.4 | 73.5 | 37.5 | 83.4 | 57.9 | 75.8 | 48.2 |
| 70-74 | 59.6 | 19.9 | 69.1 | 31.2 | 69.9 | 31.8 | 82.0 | 53.3 | - | - |
| 75- | | | 61.3 | 27.1 | 60.8 | 23.8 | 77.4 | 48.4 | - | - |
| **Total** | **76.5** | **46.2** | **85.6** | **67.1** | **85.6** | **70.9** | **90.5** | **82.8** | **88.6** | **80.0** |

* Socio-Economic Survey.

*Source*: Department of Census and Statistics, Colombo

Sri Lanka and the Maldives are the only countries in the South Asian or SAARC region to have this relatively high literacy rates. In the early eighties, urban and rural female literacy rates in other South Asian countries were 47.3 per cent and 17.9 per cent in India, 31.1 per cent and 15.3 per cent in Bangladesh, 34.7 per cent and 7.3 per cent in Pakistan and 33.0 per cent and 7.6 per cent in Nepal (Statistical Review, UNESCO 1985).

Nevertheless, it would be unwise to generalize from national statistics in Sri Lanka as age, regional, ethnic and socio-economic disparities do exist which have not only policy implications, but whose shadows might be cast long into the future. The most positive indications of higher levels of literacy in the future are the age-wise literacy rates presented in Table 9:2. Female literacy rates in all age groups had been low up till 1946, but there was a sharp increase in the school-age population between the years 1946 and 1963 and a lower increase between 1963 and the 1980s.

Gender disparities meanwhile, declined to parity in the age groups 10-14 and 15-19. Disparities are minimal between 20 and 29 years, leaving the difference between the relatively high literacy rates among women under 45 years and the low rates among older women as the only striking feature. This dividing line appears to coincide with the availability of free education facilities and increase in incentives from 1945.

It will be seen from Table 9:3 that gender disparities in literacy hardly existed among the urban school age population (10-19 years) by 1963 and that by 1981 rural female literacy rates in this age group were slightly higher than rural male literacy rates. Although 8.7 per cent of the male population and 17.5 per cent of the female population had received no schooling and were illiterate in 1981, this non-schooled illiterate group was 5.8 per cent of boys and 7.1 per cent of girls in the 10-14 age group and 7.1 per cent and 8.5 per cent in the 15-19 age group (Census 1981).

This situation obviously reflects the impact of national education and other social policies, and in particular the provision of incentives and support and the establishment of an extensive network of schools in urban and rural areas. It also points to positive attitudes of parents to the education of girls. Studies in Sri Lanka have shown that except in the estate sector and among conservative rural Muslims, parents do not often differentiate between the educational needs of sons and daughters, and that they have equally high aspirations for both (Jayaweera 1979; CENWOR 1987).

Predisposing factors would be free education policies throughout the education system that relieved parents of the need to make investment choices, the perception of parents of the instrumental value of education as an agent of upward socio-economic mobility, and the relatively egalitarian tradition and social structure in Sri lanka with respect to inheritance and other assets.

Table 9:3 Literacy (10-19 age groups)

| | Census 1946 | | Census 1963 | | Census 1981 | | LF&SE Survey 1985 - 1986 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 10-14 | 15-19 | 10-14 | 15-19 | 10-14 | 15-19 | 10-14 | 15-19 |
| **All Island** | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 61.9 | 69.9 | 84.7 | 86.3 | 88.8 | 89.7 | 88.8 | 89.0 |
| Male | 68.6 | 79.5 | 86.6 | 90.3 | 88.8 | 89.9 | 89.6 | 89.7 |
| Female | 54.9 | 59.0 | 82.7 | 82.2 | 88.8 | 89.4 | 88.1 | 88.1 |
| **Urban** | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 71.5 | 80.8 | 90.9 | 93.5 | 93.1 | 94.7 | 90.4 | 91.2 |
| Male | 74.6 | 84.7 | 91.5 | 94.8 | 93.4 | 95.2 | 90.5 | 92.8 |
| Female | 68.0 | 75.1 | 90.3 | 92.1 | 92.8 | 94.2 | 90.4 | 89.6 |
| **Rural** | | | 83.4 | 84.5 | | | | |
| Total | 60.5 | 67.8 | 85.6 | 89.1 | 87.6 | 88.2 | 90.2 | 90.2 |
| Male | 67.8 | 78.3 | 81.1 | 79.8 | 87.5 | 88.3 | 90.4 | 90.0 |
| Female | 52.9 | 65.0 | | | 87.7 | 88.1 | 89.9 | 90.5 |
| **Estate** | | | - | - | | | | |
| Total | - | - | - | - | - | - | 60.5 | 59.1 |
| Male | - | - | - | - | - | - | 68.4 | 68.4 |
| Female | - | - | | | - | - | 54.7 | 54.7 |

Lf & SE Survey = Labour Force and Socio-Economic Survey
*Source*: Department of Census and Statistics, Colombo.

Relative gender equality in access to education is reflected in the participation rates presented in Tables 9:4 and 9:5. It will be observed that the participation rates of girls increase with age so that more girls are retained in education and are able to move beyond literacy. The exception is the estate sector, and the 1984/85 survey data in Table 9:3 indicates that future gender disparities will be the outcome of imbalances in this sector.

It is useful to examine geographical and socio-economic disparities with the caveat that the data presented encompasses all age groups reflecting therefore past as well as present trends. With respect to disparities it is seen that all the districts with one exception have male literacy rates of over 80 per cent while only 13 of the 24 districts have female literacy rates of at least 80 per cent. Regional or district imbalances in literacy rates are, however, wide among both men and women. Differences are wide between literacy rates in the best performance district, Colombo, in the case of both men and women and low performance districts.

Table 9:4 Participation Rates in Education: Urban & Rural (1981)

| Age | Total | | | Urban | | | Rural | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Total** | **M** | **F** | **Total** | **M** | **F** | **Total** | **M** | **F** |
| 5 - 9 | 84.4 | 84.5 | 84.2 | 86.6 | 86.4 | 86.9 | 83.8 | 84.1 | 83.6 |
| 10 - 14 | 82.4 | 82.9 | 81.8 | 85.2 | 86.4 | 84.4 | 81.6 | 82.1 | 81.1 |
| 5 - 14 | 83.7 | 83.7 | 83.6 | 85.9 | 86.4 | 85.6 | 82.7 | 83.1 | 82.4 |
| 15 - 19 | 41.9 | 41.2 | 42.7 | 46.4 | 44.9 | 48.0 | 0.6 | 40.0 | 41.3 |
| 19 - 24 | 8.9 | 8.7 | 9.0 | 9.7 | 9.4 | 10.2 | 8.7 | 9.1 | 8.7 |
| 5 - 24 | 55.8 | 56.0 | 55.6 | 56.2 | 55.3 | 57.3 | 55.7 | 56.3 | 55.2 |

*Source*: Census of Ceylon

Table 9:5 Enrollment in Schools (1987)

| Grade | Total No. | No.of Females | % of Females |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 - 5 | 1,993,994 | 961,974 | 48.2 |
| 6 - 8 | 377,453 | 434,145 | 49.5 |
| 9 - 11 | 796,950 | 416,064 | 52.2 |
| 12-13 Science | 55,094 | 25,856 | 46.9 |
| Arts | 67,441 | 47,519 | 70.5 |
| Commerce | 42,227 | 22,636 | 53.6 |
| Total (12-13) | 164,762 | 96,011 | 49.8 |
| Grades 1-13 Total | 3,833,159 | 1,908,194 | 58.3 |

*Source*: Annual School Census, Statistics Division, Ministry of Education

In 1963, male literacy rates were lowest in Moneragala and in Batticaloa, that is in the rural hinterland and in the Muslim areas in the Eastern Province. Female literacy rates were lowest in the same districts and in Ampara in the eastern hinterland and in the plantation districts of Nuwara Eliya and Badulla. In 1981, both male and female literacy rates were lowest in Batticaloa and the situation even with regard to women had improved in the rural eastern districts and in the plantation districts, though these were still low performing districts (Table 9:6).

The NATE Survey which covered two high, three medium and three low literary districts, confirm these trends since Colombo had high rates and Moneragala in the rural East, and Badulla and Nuwara Eliya, the plantation districts, had relatively low rates (Table 9:7).

Table 9:6 Literacy Rates of the Population aged 10 Years and Over, by Districts

| | 1963 | | | 1981 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| District | Total | M | F | Total | M | F |
| Sri Lanka | 76.9 | 85.6 | 67.3 | 86.5 | 90.5 | 82.4 |
| Colombo | 88.4 | 92.4 | 83.9 | 93.8 | 95.7 | 91.7 |
| Gampaha | - | - | - | 94.2 | 96.1 | 92.2 |
| Kalutara | 82.6 | 88.8 | 76.1 | 89.2 | 92.1 | 86.4 |
| Kandy | 71.1 | 83.0 | 58.1 | 85.1 | 90.4 | 80.0 |
| Matale | 70.9 | 83.2 | 57.3 | 82.5 | 87.9 | 77.0 |
| N'Eliya | 62.7 | 79.2 | 44.6 | 78.6 | 87.4 | 69.7 |
| Galle | 80.2 | 87.3 | 73.5 | 89.3 | 92.3 | 86.5 |
| Matara | 74.2 | 83.7 | 65.2 | 85.1 | 89.6 | 81.0 |
| Hambantota | 68.3 | 80.8 | 55.0 | 80.5 | 86.8 | 74.0 |
| Jaffna | 84.7 | 89.1 | 80.3 | 92.9 | 94.1 | 91.7 |
| Mannar | 75.6 | 82.8 | 65.9 | 86.9 | 89.1 | 84.1 |
| Vavunia | 80.3 | 86.0 | 71.6 | 82.4 | 86.6 | 77.2 |
| Mullativu | - | - | - | 87.2 | 90.1 | 83.5 |
| Batticaloa | 62.9 | 75.3 | 49.2 | 66.1 | 72.7 | 59.4 |
| Ampari | 62.1 | 76.5 | 43.5 | 75.7 | 83.2 | 67.4 |
| Trincomalee | 73.4 | 82.5 | 60.1 | 78.6 | 84.0 | 72.2 |
| Kurunegala | 78.4 | 87.4 | 68.4 | 87.6 | 91.0 | 83.3 |
| Puttalam | 84.7 | 89.8 | 79.1 | 89.5 | 91.7 | 87.2 |
| Anuradhpura | 75.1 | 85.9 | 61.1 | 85.3 | 90.0 | 79.7 |
| Polonawura | 76.1 | 83.9 | 63.9 | 86.2 | 89.2 | 82.1 |
| Badulla | 61.3 | 76.7 | 44.3 | 76.5 | 84.7 | 68.2 |
| Monoragala | 60.0 | 73.1 | 43.4 | 76.3 | 80.0 | 70.8 |
| Ratnapura | 68.2 | 80.1 | 54.5 | 81.3 | 86.9 | 75.2 |
| Kegalle | 74.8 | 84.7 | 64.2 | 86.9 | 91.6 | 82.4 |

*Source*: Census of Population, 1963, 1981.

It is significant that district imbalances in literacy rates reflect differences in the historical pattern of socio-economic development as well as the cultural constraints of minority ethnic groups. The developed South-West sector of the island and the North - Jaffna district - had the highest male and female literacy rates, and the East and Southeast and plantation areas the lowest. The NATE Survey found that as recently as in 1988, 48.0 per cent of the non-school going population between 7 and 20 years in Nuwara Eliya, 30.4 per cent in Moneragala and 29 per cent in Badulla had never been to school and have had no opportunities to acquire literacy skills. Cultural constraints are clearly the outcome of social norms pertaining to the gender division of labor and gender role behavioural expectations among ethnic groups. Reference has been made already to the unique situation in the estate sector with regard to literacy and education. The estate population are the descendants of immigrant South Indian plantation labor brought to the country by the British colonial administration. The male dominance that was embedded in the cultural norms of their communities of origin have been perpetuated in their isolation from the general pattern of development in the country (Kurian 1982). Their horizons have been limited to employment opportunities on the plantations and their levels of aspirations therefore reduced. In recent years, more girls have been enrolled in schools and 45.9 per cent of the estate school population were girls in 1985 so that it is likely that the situation will improve with purposeful programmes.

Table 9:7 Literacy in Eight Districts

| | Ability to Read | | | Ability to Write | | | Literacy | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total |
| Anuradhpura | 88.7 | 81.0 | 84.9 | 87.2 | 78.4 | 82.8 | 86.1 | 77.9 | 82.1 |
| Badulla | 81.8 | 69.3 | 75.5 | 80.7 | 67.7 | 74.4 | 79.5 | 67.6 | 73.6 |
| Colombo | 94.1 | 89.2 | 91.7 | 93.0 | 88.0 | 90.5 | 92.6 | 87.2 | 89.9 |
| Kalutara | 92.6 | 86.3 | 89.4 | 92.1 | 85.0 | 88.5 | 90.3 | 83.7 | 86.9 |
| Matale | 84.6 | 74.6 | 79.6 | 86.4 | 76.0 | 81.1 | 83.0 | 73.3 | 78.1 |
| Moneragala | 79.6 | 71.5 | 75.9 | 77.7 | 68.0 | 73.2 | 77.2 | 68.2 | 73.0 |
| N'Eliya | 82.6 | 64.2 | 73.6 | 81.8 | 61.9 | 72.0 | 81.5 | 61.4 | 71.6 |
| Puttalam | 85.5 | 79.7 | 82.5 | 88.0 | 77.9 | 80.8 | 82.1 | 76.5 | 79.2 |
| Total | 88.6 | 80.5 | 84.6 | 87.8 | 79.1 | 81.1 | 86.7 | 78.1 | 82.4 |

*Source*: Survey of Literacy Among the Adult Population in Eight Districts of Sri Lanka (1988). The National Association for Total Education, Sri Lanka.

The other ethnic group that has low literacy rates are the Sri Lanka Moors (Table 9:8) whose educational backwardness is particularly evident in the Eastern Province where a large proportion are concentrated. In all population groups, age cohorts, and district and ethnic groups, however, the socio-economic status of the family as determined by income appears to affect access to literacy through the education system. The Consumer Finances and Socio-Economic Survey of 1981/82 found a correlation of .67 for men and .63 for women between income and literacy.

Table 9:8 Literacy Rates, 1981 (population over 10 years)

| Ethnic Group | Total | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sinhala | 88.4 | 91.8 | 84.9 |
| Sri Lanka Tamil | 86.6 | 89.4 | 94.3 |
| Indian Tamil | 66.9 | 78.6 | 55.1 |
| Sri Lanka Moor | 79.3 | 86.7 | 71.5 |
| Malay | 91.1 | 93.2 | 88.9 |
| Burgher | 97.1 | 98.2 | 96.1 |
| Others | 86.1 | 91.2 | 79.8 |
| Total | 86.5 | 91.5 | 82.4 |

*Source*: Census of Ceylon, 1981.

It is evident that this correlation would have been much higher if education policies had not extended educational opportunity to most segments of the population. Both in this survey (Table 9:9) and in the NATE Survey (Tables 9:10 and 9:11) the percentage of men and women who could read and write increased with rise in incomes; and gender disparities are minimal in upper income groups. These surveys as well as other studies (Haputantri 1979; NFE Division and UNICEF 1984 and 1985), have identified economic constraints such as inability to provide basic requirements for participation in formal education and the opportunity cost of education as the major cause of non-schooling.

Wider disparities are observed between female literacy rates of the lowest and highest income groups than between male literacy rates in the two groups, raising the issue as to whether women have been more vulnerable than men to economic pressures. Nevertheless, the NATE Survey data (1988) indicates that this situation may have changed at least in some families. School participation rates of the 6-18 age group were found to be identical for boys and girls in this sample, and more importantly, participation rates in the lowest income groups were higher for girls than for boys as the latter had perhaps easier access to even casual employment. Differences between literacy rates of lowest and highest income groups were considerably narrower for girls than for boys (Table 9:12). As in all other literacy related statistics, therefore, the situation of younger age groups differs from that of older age groups, auguring positive future developments.

In the estate sector, however, the relationship between income and female literacy is less consistent particularly in the higher income groups. This phenomenon may relate to the higher level of aspirations of middle level employees who strive for upward mobility while more affluent families give lower priority to education and literacy.

Table 9:9 Literacy Rates of Persons of Age 5 Years and Above by Income Groups and Sex: All Island

| Income Groups of Spending (Rs) | Literacy Rate | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Both Sexes |
| 0 - 100 | 86.7 | 71.0 | 78.7 |
| 101 - 200 | 82.9 | 72.7 | 77.3 |
| 201 - 400 | 79.2 | 62.8 | 69.9 |
| 401 - 600 | 82.4 | 70.6 | 76.2 |
| 601 - 800 | 84.9 | 74.7 | 79.7 |
| 801 - 1000 | 87.4 | 77.7 | 82.4 |
| 1,001 - 1,500 | 90.1 | 81.1 | 85.5 |
| 1,501 - 2,000 | 92.8 | 85.1 | 88.9 |
| 2,001 - 2,500 | 94.5 | 86.6 | 90.5 |
| 2,501 - 3,000 | 95.2 | 92.1 | 93.7 |
| 3,001 - 4,000 | 96.3 | 92.2 | 94.3 |
| 4,001 - 5,000 | 94.1 | 88.1 | 91.0 |
| 5,001 - 10,000 | 95.2 | 92.0 | 93.6 |
| over 10,000 | 96.1 | 91.3 | 93.8 |
| All Income Groups | 89.9 | 81.1 | 85.4 |

*Source*: Consumer Finances and Socio-Economic Survey (1981/82). Central Bank of Ceylon.

Table 9:10 Income (in Rupees), and Literacy: Ability to Read, 1988 (15+)

| Annual Income | Urban | | | Rural | | | Estate | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | F | T | M | F | T | M | F | T |
| - 4000 | 84.2 | 74.8 | 79.7 | 79.5 | 69.4 | 74.5 | 67.1 | 43.4 | 54.7 |
| 4,001 - 8,000 | 89.3 | 83.4 | 86.1 | 85.7 | 79.1 | 82.4 | 75.9 | 55.1 | 66.2 |
| 8,001 - 12,000 | 89.7 | 83.5 | 86.4 | 88.5 | 80.2 | 84.3 | 80.6 | 57.7 | 69.5 |
| 12,001 - 14,000 | 96.3 | 92.0 | 94.2 | 96.1 | 90.8 | 93.5 | 85.7 | 63.0 | 74.5 |
| 14,001 - 20,000 | 97.3 | 93.3 | 95.3 | 95.1 | 89.8 | 92.4 | 90.6 | 63.3 | 76.1 |
| 20,001 - 24,000 | 97.2 | 91.9 | 94.7 | 98.6 | 92.3 | 95.4 | 97.0 | 65.6 | 81.5 |
| 24,001 - 28,000 | 95.9 | 96.3 | 96.1 | 94.3 | 83.5 | 88.6 | 97.4 | 71.4 | 83.8 |
| 28,001 - 32,000 | 100.0 | 98.2 | 99.1 | 98.5 | 95.7 | 97.1 | 100.0 | 20.0 | 50.0 |
| 32,001 - 36,000 | 100.0 | 90.9 | 95.6 | 93.0 | 98.2 | 95.3 | 78.9 | 48.3 | 65.7 |
| over 36,000 | 98.0 | 96.7 | 97.4 | 99.4 | 96.8 | 98.1 | 86.2 | 50.0 | 71.4 |
| Total | 93.7 | 88.8 | 91.3 | 87.1 | 79.7 | 83.4 | 80.9 | 56.6 | 69.1 |

*Source*: The National Association for Total Education, Sri Lanka, 1988.

Table 9:11 Income and Literacy (Ability to Write), 1988

| Annual Income | Urban | | | Rural | | | Estate | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | F | T | M | F | T | M | F | T |
| - 4000 | 84.3 | 70.2 | 77.5 | 78.2 | 68.1 | 73.2 | 61.8 | 41.0 | 50.9 |
| 4,001 - 8,000 | 91.4 | 83.9 | 87.4 | 84.4 | 78.2 | 81.3 | 76.2 | 54.2 | 65.8 |
| 8,001 - 12,000 | 89.4 | 82.7 | 85.8 | 87.9 | 78.6 | 83.2 | 79.1 | 53.3 | 66.7 |
| 12,001 - 14,000 | 93.7 | 90.2 | 90.2 | 95.3 | 90.8 | 93.2 | 83.9 | 63.0 | 73.6 |
| 14,001 - 20,000 | 96.9 | 91.9 | 94.4 | 95.5 | 88.7 | 92.0 | 90.6 | 63.3 | 76.1 |
| 20,001 - 24,000 | 96.1 | 90.7 | 93.6 | 96.7 | 92.4 | 94.5 | 90.9 | 62.5 | 76.9 |
| 24,001 - 28,000 | 95.2 | 94.4 | 94.8 | 93.5 | 80.7 | 86.8 | 97.4 | 71.4 | 83.8 |
| 28,001 - 32,000 | 100.0 | 98.2 | 99.1 | 97.0 | 93.0 | 94.9 | 100.0 | 20.0 | 50.0 |
| 32,001 - 36,000 | 99.0 | 91.3 | 95.4 | 95.8 | 96.6 | 96.2 | 76.3 | 51.7 | 65.7 |
| over 36,000 | 98.3 | 95.9 | 97.1 | 98.9 | 96.3 | 97.5 | 86.2 | 50.0 | 71.4 |
| Total | 93.4 | 87.3 | 90.3 | 86.2 | 78.5 | 82.4 | 79.5 | 54.8 | 67.4 |

*Source*: Survey on Literacy among the Adult Population in Eight Districts of Sri Lanka (1988), The National Board for Total Education, Sri Lanka.

Table 9:12 Income and School Participation Rates (6-18 years), 1988

| Annual Income (Rs) | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| - 4000 | 77.0 | 83.3 | 80.1 |
| 4,001 - 8,000 | 84.8 | 83.5 | 84.1 |
| 8,001 - 12,000 | 87.2 | 84.1 | 85.6 |
| 12,001 - 14,000 | 89.6 | 91.5 | 90.6 |
| 14,001 - 20,000 | 94.0 | 91.8 | 92.9 |
| 20,001 - 24,000 | 89.2 | 87.2 | 88.2 |
| 24,001 - 28,000 | 93.5 | 89.7 | 91.7 |
| 28,001 - 32,000 | 100.0 | 91.4 | 95.7 |
| 32,001 - 36,000 | 90.2 | 84.3 | 87.5 |
| over 36,000 | 97.6 | 93.1 | 95.7 |
| Total | 86.0 | 86.0 | 86.0 |

*Source*: Survey of Literacy among the Adult Population in Eight Districts of Sri Lanka (1988). The National Association for Total Education, Sri Lanka.

## Concluding Remarks

This analysis of the status of literacy among women in Sri Lanka has identified the factors that have facilitated improvement in literacy level and those that impede the achievement of universal literacy. The major causative factor for achieving current literacy levels has been the commitment of policy makers to educational opportunity without gender bias and the increase in educational participation despite the absence of compulsory education legislation. In consequence parity has been achieved gender wise in the literacy levels of younger age cohorts, a trend that is likely to be extended to the total population with the passage of time.

Around 15 per cent of the population, however, are still illiterate and a 'plateau' appears to have been reached in recent years. Although the school participation rates of low income groups are reported to have improved since the sixties (Alailima 1984), global economic pressures, unequal international relations and structural adjustment policies that have been imposed have exacerbated the economic constraints of a low income country in which a significant proportion of the population live below the 'poverty line' and income disparities of high and low income categories have widened in the last decade (Central Bank of Ceylon, 1981/82 and Department of Census and Statistics 1985/86). The fact that 8 per cent to 10 per cent of an age cohort still does not enter the school system implies that a segment of the population will continue to be illiterate and universal literacy likely to remain a distant goal unless specific strategies are introduced to bring this group within the ambit of the formal education system or non-formal education programmes.

District and ethnic disparities were seen to coincide on some locations. Incomes of rural poverty groups are currently lower on average than incomes of plantation labor families, yet rural literacy rates are significantly higher than estate literacy rates. The Sri Lankan situation thus illustrates the concurrent operation of two 'functions' of education. The urban and rural masses look to education as an agent of upward socio-economic mobility for both sons and daughters and as an avenue of escape from poverty to a better future (CENWOR 1987). Education also operates as an agent of socio-cultural reproduction (Bowles & Gintis 1976; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977), reproducing social relations and transmitting social norms and cultural values, including gender role stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes (Macdonald 1980). These norms affect male perceptions and influence the allocation of resources and labor within the family, chiefly in the Muslim community and in the estate sector, so that women in these communities tend to be deprived of access to even basic skills such as literacy.

The task that faces Sri lanka is therefore to focus on pockets of social as well as economic disadvantage. The dependence on the formal education system to promote literacy in Sri Lanka has had its limitations. Countries such as Indonesia have implemented non-formal education programmes that reach the out-of-school population. Other countries in the Region are attempting to use non-formal education as a complementary strategy to achieve universal primary education. In Sri Lanka complacency engendered by literacy rates that are comparatively higher than those in neighbouring countries, and concentration of limited resources on the formal education system have resulted in the relative neglect of the out-of-school and illiterate population.

The programme of part-time, non-formal literacy centres for out-of-school children between six and fourteen years introduced in 1981 has received low priority and reaches less than five per cent of this target group. The Learning Activity Centres established in remote areas for the 5-10 out-of-school population are in their infancy. Those enrolled in such Centres are from economically deprived families (Jayaweera 1985). The expansion of this programme to pockets of non-schooling appears to be a sine qua non for ensuring universal literacy. It is significant, however, that 51.5 per cent of those enrolled in the 223 Literacy Centres and 52.9 per cent of those in the 19 Learning Activity Centres in 1988 were girls (NFE Division 1988), thus underscoring the fact that poverty rather than gender affects access to literacy in major population groups. In view of the fact that poverty and child labor continue to deprive children from economically disadvantaged groups of even primary education, complementary strategies are necessary to equip them with at least basic skills in the 3Rs to assist them to improve their economic productivity and their quality of life. A recent study showed that almost half the 'street children' in the heart of the city of Colombo have never been to school and are illiterate (Rädda Barnen 1986).

Unlike in other countries in the Region, adult literacy has received the lowest priority in national policies or non-governmental programmes in Sri Lanka, as education is expected to extend its outreach to all strata of the population. Yet around 30 per cent of women in the age group 45-60 years and nearly 20 per cent between 30 and 40 years are illiterate. This lacuna in the lives of these women has implications as these years are a mentally and economically productive period in the context of rising life expectancy which was 72 years for women and 68 years for men in the early 1980s. Most of these illiterate women belong to low income families and are often primary income earners who are mainly responsible for family survival and maintenance. Their illiteracy confines them to low paid, unskilled work which in turn reinforces their poverty and affects adversely the future prospects of their children.

Studies focusing on literacy are very few in Sri Lanka. A recent study of a sample of rural women found that illiterate women visited maternal and child health clinics less often, were less inclined to seek immunization against tetanus, had unattended home deliveries, and had a higher incidence of perinatal and neonatal mortality among their infants (Meegama & Gaminiratne 1986). There is evidence too that maternal and child nutrition is adversely affected by illiteracy in women (Soyza 1985). It is interesting to note also that illiteracy has contributed to the loss by estate women, of control over their own incomes and to their subordination in the domestic and economic environment.

The promotion of literacy has been perceived as a component of two strategies that have been prioritized globally since the seventies. Universal primary education as a facet of the basic needs strategy of the mid-1970s seeks to ensure stabilization of literacy through at least of five years of schooling. Lifelong education on the other hand, is concerned with literacy, post literacy and continuing education to facilitate the application of skills.

In the Sri Lankan context, the concept of equal educational opportunity - a priority over four decades - and of universal primary education has yet to transcend the institutional limits of the formal education system and to counter gender role stereotypes in a small segment of the population. It has to be integrated in a conceptual framework of universal literacy and lifelong education that will ensure to all gender equality, social justice, human dignity, and human rights.

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## Chapter Ten

# Education for Women's Equality: A Pipe Dream?

## A Case From India

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### India's New Education Policy: Emphasis on Women's Education

India's New Education Policy announced in 1986, was the product of a nation-wide debate that was initiated the previous year. The policy acknowledged clearly that the development of educational facilities in the country continued to bypass the vast majority of the poorest, be they men, women or children and recognized that education currently provided was neither relevant nor accessible to those for whom it was intended.

It therefore envisaged that this situation could be changed if education was perceived by the people themselves as a socially meaningful process through which they could acquire the information and skills to transform their lives and their social and economic conditions, individually and collectively. The policy also recognized that the social, economic and cultural situation of specific groups of people were the very barriers that kept them out of the education system and yet education could provide the means to enable them to overcome these barriers.

This was most crucial in the case of women. As the Policy stated: "Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women . . . (it) will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values . . . . The removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to and retention in elementary education will receive overriding priority through provisions of special support services. . . . The policy of non-discrimination will be pursued. . . to eliminate sex stereotyping."

## Women's Literacy : The Present Scenario

Despite the thrust on universalization of primary education and adult education as well as a growth in percentage of literacy over the years, the number of illiterates has progressively increased (see Table 10:1). Both regional and sex disparities also still persist as highlighted in Tables 10:2 and 10:3 below.

Table 10:1 Number of Illiterates/Literates in India (in millions)

| | All Age Groups | | Age Group 15-35 yrs | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1951** | **1981** | **1951** | **1981** |
| No. of illiterates | 300 | 437 | 91 | 110 |
| No. of literates | 60 | 247 | 27 | 111 |
| Literacy percentage | 16.6 | 36.6 | 22.7 | 50.0 |

*Source*: National Literacy Mission, Government of India, Jan. 1988.

Table 10:2 Regional Disparities in Literacy, 1981

| | Highest (%) | | Lowest (%) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Literacy rate: all persons | Kerala | 70 | Arunachal Pradesh | 21 |
| Literacy rate: Scheduled castes | Kerala | 56 | Bihar | 10 |
| Literacy rates: scheduled tribes | Mizoram | 60 | Andra Pradesh | 8 |
| Female illiteracy: rural areas | Kerala | 65 | Rajasthan | 5.5 |

*Source*: National Literacy Mission, G.o.I., 1988.

Table 10:3 Sex Disparity in Literacy, 1981

| | Males | Females |
|---|---|---|
| Literacy rate: all areas | 47% | 25% |
| Literacy rate: urban areas | 66% | 48% |
| Literacy rate: rural areas | 41% | 18% |

*Source*: NLM, G.o.I. 1988.

The table below shows the growth in literacy rate for the period 1901 to 1981 by the beginning of each decade.

Table 10:4 Literacy Rates by Sex for India during the period 1901 to 1981 (in percentage)

| Year | Persons | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1901 | 5.35 | 9.83 | 0.6 |
| 1911 | 5.92 | 10.56 | 1.05 |
| 1921 | 7.16 | 12.21 | 1.81 |
| 1931 | 9.50 | 15.59 | 2.93 |
| 1941 | 16.10 | 24.90 | 7.30 |
| 1951 | 16.67 | 24.95 | 7.93 |
| 1961 | 24.02 | 34.44 | 12.95 |
| 1971 | 29.45 | 39.45 | 18.69 |
| 1981 | 36.23 | 46.89 | 24.82 |

*Source*: NLM, G.o.I, 1988.

## Socio-Economic Barriers to Women's Education

Women's literacy rate is poor because women, irrespective of age, community or class, live within varying degrees of subjugation in the patriarchal system that characterizes the Indian culture. Women are thus seen as reproducers not only of the next generation, but of the subsistence conditions which guarantee the daily survival of the family. The poorer the woman, the more responsibilities she has to bear in order to ensure subsistence living for the family.

Education of women is thus primarily perceived as a means for improving her skills to play this role. Among the elites and the middle class, formal education is seen to do this quite concretely - she can look better, cook better, run a more efficient home, and may even supplement the family's income. But for the poor, this kind of schooling has little to offer - "learning to survive against impossible odds, to walk longer distances to fetch water or fuelwood, to work in the field or on construction sites, to give birth to and feed the children all these are far better learnt in the school of life experience" (Batliwala & Ramachandran 1987). Living as they have done in conditions of poverty for generations, the poor cannot see how sending their daughters to school can ever change their existential reality. In other words, the barriers to women's education relate to issues of class and gender.

Batliwala & Ramachandran (1987) analyze some of the important constraints to women's education. Besides the daily struggle for food, fuel, water, fodder for the cattle, child bearing and rearing, poor women also have to work to earn a living wage. This leaves them little time for any educational activity. Socially they are isolated. Their social and family roles are well defined and their social interaction is determined by cultural traditions and taboos. They therefore go about their daily routine chores in isolation and have no time or space to talk about themselves with other women. They are also socially and physically oppressed as women. They have very little control over or knowledge about their bodies. Besides being battered and violated, they suffer from a low self image. They lack self confidence and a feeling of self worth and self-esteem.

Typically, women do not have access to information beyond their immediate environment. Alienated from decision-making processes, they relate to government schemes and programmes as passive recipients and have no awareness about their legal rights and entitlement.

## Alternate Strategy for Women's Education

It was after identifying some of these crucial socio-economic barriers to women's education that an alternate strategy for women's education was conceived. Some of the salient features of this strategy are elaborated upon here as they form the basis of a pilot project called, Mahila Samakhya, *Education for Women's Equality*, that is being carried out on a pilot basis in three states of India, with a possibility of future expansion.

The strategy envisages that the educational programme would be shaped and determined by the women who are its participants. In other words, the form, nature and content of the programme would not be shaped by a group of external planners. Rather, they would act merely as "catalysts" and work only on how women's participation can be brought about in a specific context. In order to do this, the programme would create a time and space for women to meet, to be together, and begin a process of thinking and reflecting on their predicament and every-day life experiences. This process would necessarily be slow and would not be hurried.

Gradually, these conditions would create an "environment for learning" but what women would decide to learn may not necessarily be reading and writing. For experience thus far has shown that poor women rarely see the relevance of literacy in the initial stages. This is not to suggest that the programme would end up doing everything else but making women literate. A large number of micro-projects have shown that women always seek literacy themselves at a point when its meaning and value become evident to them.

The educational process would be based on total respect for women's existing knowledge, experiences and skills. Since women's own perception of their place in society stems from low self-esteem, efforts would be made to help women build a positive and strong self-image by respecting them the way they are.

Thus far, the adult education programme for women had tended to be a mere literacy programme. The strategy would now have to be different. Education would now have to be a process which enabled women to question, conceptualize, find answers, act, reflect on actions and raise new questions. In other words, education for raising critical consciousness of women would be necessary.

But for all this to happen, there would be need for the backing of a strong support system. At each level, continuous inputs would be needed in the form of training, supervision, resource materials, analysis, replanning, otherwise the entire process would irrevocably collapse. The role of the functionaries would be to keep the process alive, nurture it and help it grow until it is strong enough to survive on its own.

Finally, the new education strategy envisages that every intervention and interaction which occurred in the programme must itself be a microcosm of the larger process of change. "The relationships, the process, the questioning which we hope will empower women must first be experienced within the programme itself" (Batliwala & Ramachandran 1987). As formulators of the pilot project, Ramachandran and Batliwala conclude that if the principles enumerated above are observed in both letter and spirit, if they are infused into the training of functionaries and in the implementation of the pilot programme, then "education for women's equality" could become a reality.

## Education for Women's Equality: A Critique

There are various reasons why the Mahila Samakhya project will not be able to achieve its stated objectives. This is largely because of certain wrong premises upon which the pilot project has been based. One of the premises relates to the participatory nature of the project. The assumption is that despite the hierarchical, bureaucratic ethos that presently prevails, it would be possible to bring about a change to participatory management styles by fostering a partnership relationship between the bureaucracy and the voluntary agencies. However, advocates of participatory approach well know that there can be comparatively weak forms of client participation in which there is a top-down initiation with some cursory consultation with low-power groups about their needs and interests. In such a situation, participation becomes ritualistic rather than substantive since decision-making and power relations are not altered (nor are they intended to be). On the other hand, what is needed is genuine participation in which it is the community that exercises control over resources and its management and defines the meaning of development for itself. But what is not clearly understood are the preconditions that are necessary for initiation and nurturing of genuine participation. Overall, such a participation can occur only within certain narrowly defined set of supporting conditions. Thus for example, if the existing national leadership is not committed to the ideology and policy of power realignment in favour of the poor, it is possible that strong client participation would only be regarded as subversive. Moreover, even if there is support and commitment from the central government, the leaders of the provincial and village levels could feel threatened at the emergence of a new and rival power base. In other words, the possibility of strong client participation is "too dependent on idiosyncratic and unpredictable occurrence of a number of fortuitous factors - most important being the existence of rare quality of charismatic leadership capable of inspiring and focussing ideological commitment" (Bock & Papagiannis 1983). In the absence of such a leadership, it is important to realize that the extent of participation of client groups will be defined and constrained by existing political and economic context.

The second premise relates to building a positive self-image among women and developing their self-confidence so that they become active participants in the process of development. The assumption here is that as individuals women would become more efficient and productive and there would be an overall improvement in their social and economic well-being. But Mahila Samakhya is particularly quiet about the manner in which the economic well-being of women would be brought about. Despite this, there is almost a naive assumption that the educational programme would have the potential for providing alternative channel of upward social and economic mobility so that inequalities could be removed and the gap between the schooled and the unschooled, the rich and the poor, men and women, could be reduced.

In understanding the role of formal schools in society, reproduction theorists assert that "the schools reinforce the division of labor in the society by maintaining class, race and gender inequalities" (Kelly & Nihlen 1982). But if formal schooling serves the function of systems support for maintenance of inequality and maldistribution, it has been said of non-formal education that it is a potentially even more effective means for limiting cross-segment mobility. For the non-formal education "locks workers into lower segments of primary sector jobs" as it "does not provide accepted and socially valued certification that is the 'gatepass' to primary sector jobs" (Bock & Papagiannis 1983). Even in the case of 'Mahila Samakhya', the level of education that is presently envisaged for women would automatically siphon off a vast majority of poor women who would continue to be relegated to secondary segments of labor market. For as an analysis of 1981 Census data in India has shown, as much as 87.3 per cent of rural women were listed as cultivators and agricultural labourers, known as the primary sector. Only 6.4 per cent of them were classified as working mainly in household and non-household manufacturing and processing jobs (secondary sector). The least number of working rural women (4.1 per cent) were to be found in the tertiary sector.

According to Kurrien (1988), the distribution of this rural female work force by their educational status indicated that for every increase in educational qualification, there was a shift in the labor force participation from the primary sector to the tertiary sector. A clear cut shift to the tertiary sector occurred only when women had high school qualifications. Illiterates were almost entirely concentrated in the primary sector (91.9 per cent) and agricultural labor (52.6 per cent). These women, especially those in the latter category, were likely to form the vast majority of the poorest strata of Indian society. Their work would be crucial for their individual and family sustenance and survival.

On the other hand, for both rural and urban working women, the participation rates were highest for those with technical and other diplomas and college degrees. In both urban and rural areas too, the lowest participation rates were those for literate women whose formal qualifications were less than a high school certification. Given the fact that certification is not guaranteed under 'Mahila Samakhya' presently and parity with the formal system is not envisaged, rather than equalizing opportunities, what is likely to happen is that women's mobility between segments would be inhibited and they would continue to be denied access to higher income and higher status jobs in the labor market.

But the real problem with 'Mahila Samakhya' is that it subscribes to the 'individual deficit' viewpoint according to which the root of problems of maldistribution of power and resources, lies within individuals and is not due to structural inequalities. Implicit in this viewpoint is the assumption "that change come about evolutionarily as a consequence of raising through education the competence and consciousness of individuals who in turn bring 'enlightened' pressure to bear for structural reform" (Bock & Papagiannis 1983). For structural determinants, on the other hand, 'Mahila Samakhya' would be one more example of the futility to bring about social change by changing individual's values and attitudes when what is needed is a fundamental restructuring of the entire society. For them, there would be a decidedly political and social character about such a programme. It would therefore have to be understood not only as a social agency but as an agency linked with formal schooling and other institutions of the State: in other words, within the larger socio-political context. This more holistic approach would emphasize linkages between individuals, institutions and environment.

That the thrust of Mahila Samakhya is 'person-centred' rather than 'system-centred' is apparent from the emphasis given to empowerment of women. The parameters of empowerment are elaborated thus:

- building a positive self image and self confidence;
- developing ability to think critically;
- building up group cohesion and fostering decision-making and action;
- ensuring equal participation in the process of bringing about social change;
- encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society; and
- providing the wherewithal for economic independence.

An unresolved dilemma for 'Mahila Samakhya' is why the government should cooperate in the nurturance of a process that has as one of its major goals, redistribution of power away from the centre towards the formerly low-power periphery. The question that can legitimately be asked is whether it is not contradictory to expect that it is possible, outside of revolutionary or socialist societies, to have both government support for such a programme as well as strong participation from the grassroots level.

## Conclusion

Finally, given the above arguments, does 'Mahila Samakhya' have any utility in bringing about empowerment of women? In order to answer this question one has to look at the vast body of literature that shows that education can bring about shifts in self-definitions and awareness that are potentially disruptive to the continued maintenance of the existing social order. "When changes in individuals' social meanings and awareness aggregate to produce certain 'critical density', there come into existence potential for assertive, even organized political action that was not there before and that may create preconditions for societal restructuring" (Bock & Papagiannis 1983). The participatory process of adult learning decidedly has tremendous pedagogical advantages. But in the absence of linkages with wider on-going class struggles and socio-political movements, the highly cherished goal of empowerment of women would not be realized. According to Parajuli and Mathema (quoted in Ghosh & Zachariah 1987) it is not conscienticization which is a precondition for political action but probably the reverse. Freire showed how his literacy work evolved in response to worker and peasant struggles in north-east Brazil and it was not the conscienticization programme that triggered off the peasant and workers' struggle. Thus, conscientization could become an additional tool for deepening class consciousness, sharpening the perception of the contradictions in the social relations of production and heightening workers' struggle. But for this to happen it is important to associate adult and non-formal education of the oppressed sections of the population against the hegemony of the modern State. Unless this happens, would it be far-fetched to say that 'Mahila Samakhya' and its claim about 'education for women's equality' can at best only remain a pipe-dream?

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## Chapter Eleven

# The Future of Non-Formal Education for Women in India

### Problems and Suggestions for a Fruitful Development

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## Introduction

The argument of this paper is that Non-Formal Education (NFE) in India is becoming a key factor in development work, not only because rural development is the most important goal for a better future in India, but also because NFE is, in practice the only alternative for literacy for most women. In some areas, NFE is the only alternative also for the children. Although Non-Formal Education is accorded a lower standard compared to formal education, and seemingly also a low status among politicians, it is still possible to improve the quality of NFE within the available resources. This paper discusses some of the problems associated with NFE in India and suggests possible solutions to these problems.

The paper takes a practical rather than a theoretical view of the topic and describes how NFE could develop and improve from an optimistic standpoint. The paper does not, however, predict what NFE in reality will become.

## Non-Formal Education: Definition and Scope

Radcliffe & Colletta (1985) refer to Coomb's classic definition from 1973 that NFE is "any organizational activity outside the established formal system" (p. 35-36). The problem with this definition is that "the established formal system" in the first place needs to be identified, and secondly, there are always a number of diffusions between the two systems. Radcliffe & Colletta further point out that NFE is "locally specific in application". In practice however, NFE seems to take different meanings and assume different focus from country to country.

In India, two major types of NFE are in use. The first one is the literacy courses for students of virtually any age, and this normally takes place in the evenings. The second type is vocational training which often takes place during the day. The usual assumption however, is that NFE refers to the evening courses. When Mellbring *et al.* (1983) evaluated a SIDA NFE programme in India for instance, only the evening literacy courses were discussed. On the other hand, "vocational training" is very often used instead of NFE.

Within the domain of Non-Formal Education, vocational education is generally concerned with very simple skills, such as learning to operate a sewing machine, or to learning how to type or solder electrical components and so on, but very often, reading, writing and arithmetics, as well as English or Hindi are added to the programme. Thus there is a good deal of overlapping between literacy and the vocational courses. Yet, in some parts of the country, for instance in Orissa, West Bengal, and Bihar, it is quite clear that NFE centres concentrate on basic literacy courses and exclude both vocational and polytechnic aspects of the training.

## The Setting

The literacy courses usually take place in a NFE-Centre consisting of a shed or hut, often made of clay. It often lacks windows, and typically, it is without electric power despite the fact that the sessions take place in the evenings. The shed is a small hut without windows, which becomes quite hot in the evenings after a whole day of sunshine. When many people are gathered, the heat becomes even greater when the kerosene lamps are lit.

In a typical setting, there is only one NFE Centre catering for a whole village of up to six kilometre radius. This means that participants have to walk a considerable distance to come to the nearest centre. Sometimes participants, especially the girls and the women, have to stay the night in order to avoid walking home in the darkness of the late evening. Participants attend classes 6 or 7 nights a week, for about 6 months of the year. The actual lesson time varies from two to four hours every night. This adds up to at least 500 hours or more per year.

Apart from the physical strains of walking long distances and the many hours spent every evening, trying to learn under the extremely difficult circumstances, the sheer motivation displayed by the participants deserves to be noted irrespective of whether the NFE effort is initiated within a domestic or foreign framework of a development project.

## The Teachers, the Pupils and Basic Activities

An NFE-teacher is a literate person, mostly without higher schooling, and typically without teacher training. Sometimes students who themselves attend school in grade 8, 9 or 10 work as teachers in the evening. Often the NFE teachers are volunteers, paid with a token sum. Most Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) try to provide some in-service training, usually in the form of seminars. The following quotation from Ekstrand (1989) is illustrative:

> Once a month, there is a training session in Jamda for the NFE teachers, that lasts one day. Most teachers do not have proper teacher training. They "know from their own experience in school". The training session usually consists

of discussions among the teachers about their class-room experiences (Ekstrand 1989).

Students are mostly adults, but there may also be children present. In some cases, especially in many villages, or city slum areas, where there are no schools, children are the dominant group of participants. One typical rural constraint however, is that even when there is a school in the village, children do not always attend as they have to look after the younger siblings, tend cattle, help in the fields, or collect fuel. On the other hand, some of the older adults may not be interested in really learning to read or write. They come to the NFE centres basically for the discussions, and to participate in the social exchange.

Although most NFE centres were, in the beginning, dominated by the men, quite a number of them now consist of mixed groups. It is now also becoming more and more common that the women demand to have a centre of their own. Sometimes the local Village Council, or in the cities, the Colony Council, realises that an NFE centre so important that they initiate one for the women too.

The basic activities are to learn the alphabet, some simple reading, and to learn to count and to do some simple arithmetics. Sometimes, things of importance are discussed, such as the maintenance of the new tube well, or where the new irrigation ditch should be dug, or what kind of crop to grow, and so on. Sometimes, textbooks contain such information. The texts are read over and again, and the contents are discussed. People who can neither read nor write generally have to rely on oral information, and are thus dependent on opportunities to discuss their affairs. Very often, classes are started and finished by a sung "prayer", or hymn composed by the participants themselves on a relevant topic such as immunization or health.

The womens' NFE centres conducts a number of income generating activities. Thus, the women make paper bags or leaf plates, or roll biris, (which are small Indian cigarettes). While they work, they discuss women's affairs. Their special topics may be the pros and cons of some current programme such as GOBI, the usefulness of monitoring the child's height and weight, of immunization or breast-feeding. It may also be on how to generate more income, how to make the most of their kitchen gardening, and so on. In a well organized community development programme, new information is fed via mass meetings, child-care centres, and sometimes via the texts used in reading.

## Methodology: Aims, Techniques and Functionality

There are three aims for NFE; literacy, functionality, and awareness. This means the provision of "functional literacy"on the one hand, and the creation of some insights in personal and community health and general well-being as well as the acquisition of some basic skills through training on the other. Simply put, the methodology is geared to explain the basic principles of improving the economy: in words, through books, and through pictures. Some audio-visual means are occasionally used and teachers try to develop communication skills in their students. Learning how to count is usually the most successful skill taught since everyone is interested not only in getting the best price at the market, but also in avoiding being cheated in various situations.

The usual technique for teaching how to read in NFE Centers is the spelling method. The letters of the alphabet are put together to form words. Other methods that exist, such as the phonetic method, which is far superior, (see for instance Chall 1967; Guthrie *et al.* 1976; Stebbins 1977) have, unfortunately not yet taken root in the NFE programmes. The phonetic method would be particularly suitable for NFE centres, as the principle is relatively simpler, and it is fairly easy to switch from the spelling method to the phonetic method. This method, however, is most efficient if the spelling and the pronunciation of the language coincide to a fair degree, as in Swedish, Orya and Bengali. Languages such as English, with a spelling that is very different from the pronunciation, have difficulties with both methods. In West Bengal however, adaptations of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagars' "Barna Parichaya", and Jogendra Nath Sarkar's "Hasti Khushi" are being made to introduce the phonetic method. The former book has been used already in the LWS Ultadanga project in Calcutta.

Despite these efforts however, the experience of the author has been that even those NFE students who have "learnt" how to read and write are still unable to read even simple unknown texts, or to write documents of their own, such as personal letters. Writing exercises usually consists of copying text, and reading consists of reading, over and over again, the well known contents of the reading book in use. This challenges the aim of functional literacy and thus demands that the scope of the literacy lessons should be broadened to cover the reading of unknown texts, and the writing of simple messages and letters.

Remedial teaching in its simplest form involves starting the whole alphabetization process all over from the beginning, as many reading problems consist of students not having grasped the principle, or trying to read too fast but other methods of evaluating the reading progress should also be introduced. This must consist of individual assessment and of simple diagnostic tests. The tests could be teacher-made, and administered while the other students get on with their tasks.

## Physical Conditions and Equipments

***Light***. In India as in other tropical and subtropical areas, the length of day and night do not differ very much. The sun sets around 6 p.m. in the summer and around 5 p.m. in the winter. Hence, evening courses always occur in dark. The standard lighting equipment in many NFE centres is two, sometimes four kerosene lamps. There are enough difficulties in trying to read at night from such a dim light source. Often, it is almost impossible to see any text without having the lamp so close that one almost gets burnt. Increasing the number of lamps does not improve the situation much. People with poor vision, elderly people who need more light than the young, people with night blindness and many others need substantial lighting far beyond what any number of kerosene lamps may give.

Portable petrol driven generators on the other hand, cost between 5,000 and 6,000 Rupees a piece, and give between 3 and 4 kilowatts. Such generators can be used to provide power for pumps, for electric light in NFE Centers and elsewhere, and for educational equipment of various kinds, such as video cassette players for NFE. Another possible alternative to the lighting problem is the strong kerosene pressure lamps now readily available in most urban centres. These Petromax lamps cost about 4-500 Rupees. This is certainly more expensive than the ordinary kerosene lamp, but the light output is many times that of the kerosene lamp. A third solution is to conduct the NFE courses during day-time. Certain arrangements, such as the work organization, labor exchange with neighbours and so on, could make this possible.

***Climatic conditions***. During the late spring and summer, the heat and the rains during the monsoon are effective obstacles against educational activities. However, during this very time, there is a low season in agriculture and villagers have more time to participate. It is a pity that this season cannot be used for education. Although cyclones, floods, and droughts which tend to interrupt or destroy normal activities are quite common occurrences, NFE can also be used to teach people how to minimise the damage, by building sturdier houses and dams, and improving irrigation.

***Equipment.*** Due to lack of resources, NFE Centers are, most often, very poorly equipped. Typically there is no furniture. Teacher and students sit on the floor, or stand. Audiovisual equipment is usually non-existent. In one polytechnic school, students were learning to type. There were five or six old-fashioned typewriters. The real problem, however, was the tables. These were very high, so the students had to lift their arms to the height of their shoulders while typing. This very soon leads to muscle problems and cramp. Some ergonomics knowledge could be conveyed to NFE teachers through in-service training.

## A Problem Inventory and Suggested Solutions

***Physical and Clinical problems***. India is believed to have a fairly high rate of hearing impairments. Poor vision is also quite common. In addition to ordinary visual problems, such as short-sightedness, nightblindness due to lack of vitamin A is prevalent. Lack of energy, due to malnutrition is also a contributing factor to poor attendance and poor performance. In NFE Centers, simple tests of vision and hearing could be easily performed. Hearing can be tested in a simple way that was in use in health examinations of school children and soldiers in Sweden until not long ago. The tester whispers words from one corner, and the testee answers from the other corner. Testing of short or long-sightedness can be easily arranged, provided that a board with letters is available. Once ascertained, the student with hearing or vision problems should be referred for medical treatment, whenever available. If medical care is not available, or the student cannot afford it, the teacher can at least place those with hearing and vision problems in front. The teacher can also give a little extra help to those students, and make sure that they have understood their tasks.

***Achievements and problems***. Some of the problems involved in NFE appears in the following account of a seminar with NFE teachers in a Lutheran World Service project in Bijatala in Orissa (Ekstrand 1989). The meeting took place in Bijatala on March 23, 1988, at 10 o'clock in the morning. There was a large group of around 50 persons, consisting of NFE teachers, Village Committee members, and some students. They represented 23 centres, out of which 17 are for males, 4 for females, and 2 for children. The total number of students overall was around 450. Most teachers were below matriculation, although a few had higher education. Teaching problems as outlined by the teachers were listed as follows:

1. Problems connected with the inadequacy of physical conditions and facilities (e.g., light, localities).
2. Problems related to finance (e.g., teachers' salaries and other resources).
3. Problems pertaining to the nature and quality of the syllabus (e.g., that the syllabus is too monotonous).
4. Problems arising from insufficient utilization of audio-visual and other teaching aids; and finally,
5. Problems related to the general shortage of reading texts and relevant literature.

To begin with, the teacher's salary is 60 rupees per month. The teacher works every evening during six months, which is about 150 lessons, each lasting several hours, but payment is done once for the whole year. The problems with audio-visual means are discussed in terms of video utilization. A video cassette player, a TV monitor, and a portable generator have to be carried from Rajranpur. There is a shortage of cassettes with recorded programs. The voltage varies, and is sometimes too low. Programs have to be made in many languages. The contents of the few existing programs are often too difficult, or unrelated to the actual situation of the students. Programs should be area-specific, culture-specific, language-specific, and standard-specific, and geared to the students' level.

The students' complained of a lack of materials and equipment for further work such as sewing machines meanwhile the members of the Village Committee were of the view that the syllabus should be seasonal to follow the rhythm of local activities. For instance, information and knowledge that should be used during the rainy season should be taught well before it. It would also be useful if agricultural guidance and recommendations could be compiled into a book and where writings already exist, translations should be made available for other users in the form of simple booklets. Students' achievement according to the teachers of three centers are summarised in Table 11:1 below.

Table 11:1 Students' Achievement in 3 NFE Centres (India)

| Centre I | | Centre II | | Womens' Centre | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Excellent | 4 | Excellent | 5 | Excellent | 4 |
| Medium | 6 | Medium good | 3 | Medium good | 3 |
| Below Average | 5 | Average | 7 | Below average | 5 |
| | | Below average | 1 | | |
| Total | 15 | Total | 16 | Total | 12 |

Although these are but just a few cases, yet, interesting revelations emerge from the data presented. Out of 43 students, 13 (30 per cent) are rated excellent, 19 (44 per cent) are rated average or medium good, and 11 (26 per cent) are rated below average. That means at least 74 per cent of students are rated "average" and above. Naturally, teachers base their rating on different standards, so the result in terms of functionality is probably unreliable. However, the figures seem to indicate a fair degree of motivation among the participants, and a potential for learning that is better than what could be expected, given the poor conditions. There may, however, be an unknown number of drop-outs with undetermined results.

The following explanations for the low performance of the group with learning problems were offered. The main reason was that poor people, especially the young men, have irregular attendance as their first priority is in earning some income on which they can support themselves. On the other hand, those who are very old are not interested in actually learning to read or write. They go there to listen, with the only practical purpose of picking up new ideas. They are also attracted by the visual media, such as T.V. and cinema where these are available.

***Attendance and drop-out***. If a literacy evening group consists of 30-40 persons in the beginning of a course, sometimes only half remains at the end of a course. Despite variations, attendance among the NFE students follows the agricultural activities. When these are intensive, as in sowing or harvesting, attendance is lower, and vice-versa. This is called "temporary drop-out".

***Teaching aids***. The usual teaching aids are a beginners' reading book, a slate and a piece of chalk. Paper and pencils or pens hardly ever occur. Sometimes there is a very small black-board on the wall. In some cases, posters with advice on agriculture or health are used. Chairs, desks including the teacher's are a rare sight; and in some cases, even blackboards are missing in the NFE Centres. Audio-visual aids seem to be an exceedingly rare occurrence. I believe that portable, light-weight video equipment of the Video 8 type could be very helpful. Of course, costs for purchase and maintenance are prohibitive. Nevertheless, one per village would be very beneficial. I believe that villagers should be encouraged to document their progress in various areas. Such records could serve as excellent instructional programmes for new villages starting development projects.

In a large-scale study carried out by the Swedish National Board of Education in the early 1960s, it was found that students' achievement varied with the training of the teachers (Ekstrand 1962). The better the training, the better were the students' result. However, when poorly trained teachers systematically attended distance radio courses, the results approached those of the trained teachers. Battery cassette players are now available in India at a reasonable cost. Thus, programmes for the NFE students, as well as certain instructions for the teachers could be produced centrally and distributed to NFE centers. Of course, the programmes would have to be translated to many Indian languages. Such a programme to raise the standard of teaching would be highly cost-effective.

***Bilingualism.*** In most Indian states, there is more than one language. In tribal areas, different ethnic groups speak their own languages. However, the teachers usually speak the language of the state or area. It is also very often claimed that even tribals generally speak the state language and that there is therefore no language problem. But at the seminar with NFE teachers described above, the teachers admitted that there is a wide variation in Oriya fluency among the students, but went on to say that Oriya skills are weak, because the poor have weak association with other people. Bilingualism therefore does seem to constitute a problem which has not yet been systematically studied.

***Motivation among tribals and scheduled castes.*** Among the poor, the motivation for participating in NFE, or for sending their children to school is generally low. Among Hindus, this hesitation is almost totally due to economic conditions, since Hinduism as a culture, traditionally promotes education. Among other tribes however, the situation is different. There are often many kinds of beliefs and superstitions, that may make the parents become biased against schooling until they have experienced the benefits from a development project, and have acquired confidence in the project workers.

***The role of non-formal education.*** As has been discussed above, the NFE Centre is not just a place for basic literacy, but also a place where important group processes take place. Here participants receive, exchange, digest and elaborate on new information. This process of collective concept formation is most important, for agriculture, for health and hygiene, and in fact for every aspect of community development. Nutritional Education, community health care, disease prevention, for instance, are some topics discussed in the group and in mass meetings. There are also some connections between Formal and Non-Formal Education. Firstly, if parents become literate, they become more motivated to let their children also study. Secondly, as literacy spreads in a community, the members generally become more interested in education.

***The future and importance of NFE for women.*** The role of NFE in general as described by Radcliffe & Coletta (1985) states that compared to formal education, visible costs in NFE are usually lower, and that NFE is more flexible, more decentralized in organization, less structured, more task-and-skill-oriented, more learner centred, and more locally specific. Hence NFE is now considered "complementary to, additional to, or even as an alternative to formal education" (*op.cit.* pp. 35-37). For the foreseeable future, NFE will continue to exist in India as the only option for the majority of the people in both the urban and rural areas.

It is now well known that fewer girls start school, and more girls drop out, due to socio-economic conditions than boys, and that girls, more than boys are more burdened with domestic tasks. Of non-enrolled school children, girls constitute 71 per cent in ages 6-14, and 95 per cent of the age 6-11 group (Mellbring *et al.* 1983). In the nine so-called educationally backward states (Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal) in particular, the illiteracy rate is much higher. These states have 75 per cent of all non-enrolled children in school ages. The illiteracy rate by sex for India in 1961, 1971 and 1981 is given in Table 11:2.

Table 11:2 Illiteracy in Three Decades in India

| | 1961 | 1971 | 1981 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 70 | 65 | 64 |
| Male | 58 | 53 | 53 |
| Female | 88 | 80 | 75 |

*Source*: National Literacy Mission, Government of India

## Some Concluding Remarks

We have discussed the scope, the practice, and some of the major operational problems related to the NFE programmes in the Indian setting. The problems of methodology, teaching techniques and pupil assessment have also been examined. Questions concerning functionality of the NFE aims and objectives were raised. A number of physical hazards that act to hamper the learner's performance were also outlined along with practical suggestions as to their possible solutions. But most of all, the role of NFE not only as a key factor in rural development, but also as an only option for the poor majority of the people in India is maintained throughout this paper.

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## Chapter Twelve

# Challenges to the Attainment of Women's Literacy

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## Introduction

This essay discusses some old and some new challenges to the acquisition of literacy by women. In addressing these challenges, I will examine their enduring power, tie a few loose ends in previous discussions on the issue, and underscore some of the contradictions that have emerged in the debate during the symposium. This discussion, it is hoped, should clarify some of the weaknesses in our identification of problems concerning literacy and their corresponding solution.

Five key challenges to the attainment of literacy emerge for women; they range from a theoretical understanding of the problem to specific strategies for the design and implementation of literacy programs.

## The Challenge of Feminist Theory

Literacy is widely accepted as an important personal resource in contemporary society. Yet, the absolute numbers of those unable to read and write is increasing and, in the case of women, some of the relative numbers are also increasing. What accounts for this "failure" to become literate? To what extent is it a failure of the individual and to what degree is it the result of contextual conditions? Do individuals determine their own success in literacy or do other people act as major obstacles in this quest?

The first challenge in literacy work for women will be to engage in action while considering simultaneously the powerful contributions made by feminist theory and analysis. Existing empirical findings have identified a long list of factors blocking women's access to literacy including lack of time, family responsibilities, lack of motivation, poverty, opposition by husbands, and difficulties of access to establishments where literacy classes are given. The obstacles to women's literacy are very similar to those affecting women's access to primary education. They are also very similar across culture (Strömquist 1989a). The main difference between the obstacles to the education of adult women and that of girls is that when discussing adult literacy we refer to the "women's lack of time" or "women's responsibilities in the home" while when discussing participation in formal education we speak of "the need for girls to engage in domestic labor" and "the parents' belief that education is not a priority for girls". The similarity between the obstacles to adult women's literacy and girls' participation in primary education (and at subsequent levels) reflects the fact that there is a widespread and pervasive set of forces that shape gender identity; thus, the use women make, and are allowed to make of education, cuts across age and cultural context.

The long list of obstacles to women's literacy is useful for program planning. Yet to rely on purely empirical findings has serious limitations because we risk confusing immediate manifestations of women's subordination with fundamental causes and thus failing to grasp the exact nature of the phenomenon of women's illiteracy. Feminist research has made significant contributions to the understanding of the condition of women in society and also to the condition of women in education.

For a variety of reasons, some linked to the technology of production of goods and to the reproduction of human beings, men have been able to develop and sustain a system and an ideology of patriarchy that has two mutually supportive components: the sexual division of labor and the control of women's sexuality. Patriarchal ideology today is not so crude as to declare women incompetent but has operated under the principle of complementarity. This principle assigned women the roles of mothers and wives and assumed that these tasks were natural and thus immutable attributes of women. The sexual division of labor has allowed men to have a comfortable existence by eliminating large numbers of women from the public world, by ensuring a cheap and predictable reproduction of children, and by ensuring a cheap and predictable maintenance of the household. Studies of agrarian societies generally reveal that the labor unit most commonly exploited in daily activities is the household, and within it is primarily the women. Women, therefore, suffer particularly in rural areas. It should be underscored that when girls help mothers not only are they participating in the sexual division of labor but they are also becoming socialized to be mothers and family caretakers. This socialization that teaches heavy work and obedience includes the development of self-denial attitudes and the acceptance of the importance of family over individual needs (Kinsman 1983).

The second component, women's sexuality control, was needed to make sure women maintained their roles as wives and mothers. This control operates through the mechanisms of the insistence on women's virginity, the marriage of women very soon after puberty, the sexual double standard, the codes of restricted physical mobility for women, and domestic violence (wife beating). Sexuality control results in women's inability to control their fertility, which subsequently leads to unwanted pregnancies. The practice of early marriage shapes women's orientation toward husband and family rather than self. Both norms push education away from women's attention. They also limit the mental horizons of women and lead them to accept the sexual division of labor as natural (Strömquist, 1989b). The conceptual framework discussed above allows us to link persistent manifestations of women's subordination in education to underlying causes. This is illustrated in Figure 12:1.

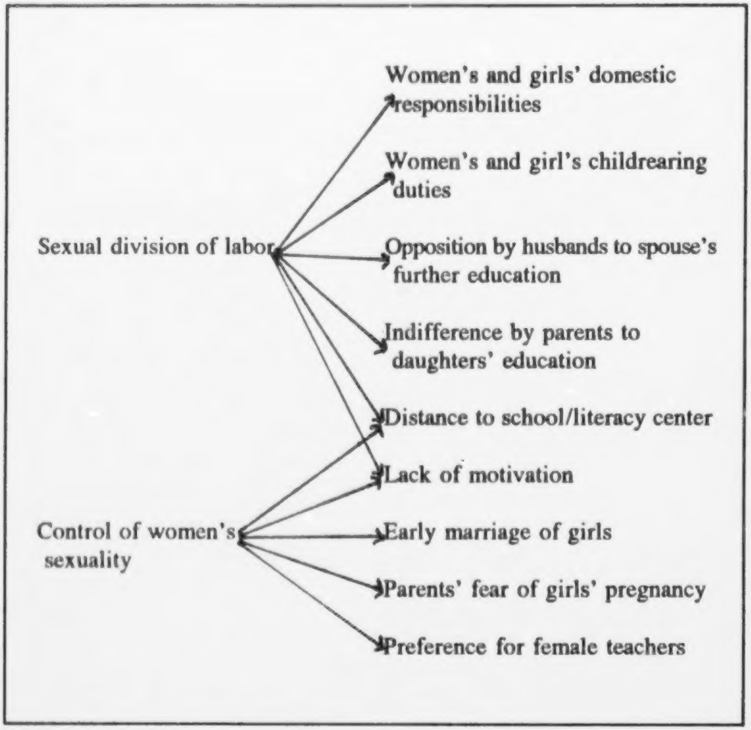
Women's and girls' domestic responsibilities
Women's and girl's childrearing duties
Sexual division of labor
Opposition by husbands to spouse's further education
Indifference by parents to daughters' education
Distance to school/literacy center
Lack of motivation
Control of women's sexuality
Early marriage of girls
Parents' fear of girls' pregnancy
Preference for female teachers

Figure 12:1 Concrete Manifestations of the Sexual Division of Labor and Sexuality Control Upon Women's Education.

Thus, women's frequent "lack of time" is really a result of the sexual division of labor that imposes upon them numerous domestic duties; "early marriage" may be seen as a cultural tradition but is primarily a resultant of preserving the virginity of daughters by ensuring they get married shortly after puberty; "distance to school" is also a manifestation of sexuality control as parents seek close schools that can enable them to have a better supervision of their daughters' sexual behaviour and safety.

Several advantages accrue from relying on theory. First, by using theory, causes become not just a string of peculiar events but are systematically linked to a particular condition. This condition does not exist at random but by design of someone whose interests are being served by the existing conditions. In feminist theory, one must admit, this someone is men.

Does it mean that man is thereby identified as the enemy? The term itself, "enemy", comes from a very manly exercise, war. The feminist purpose in addressing gender differences is (with very few exceptions) not to destroy men but to create a more egalitarian society in which both men and women will have fuller lives. So theory becomes important because it identifies the main actors sustaining gender inequalities and helps us understand the historical pattern of subordination and why efforts to transform the social order will meet fundamental obstacles. This analysis forecasts that the problem of illiteracy of poor women will not be solved merely through ingenious program design because the problem exceeds technical parameters. If men benefit from the present subordination of women, the (initial) costs of gender transformation for individual men and for the predominantly male state are substantial. It follows that for change to happen these costs will have to be made explicit so that strategies to diminish or modify them are identified.

Theory also helps us to locate obstacles in the social system and not in the individual. A case in point has to do with "motivation". The existing educational literature has made rather excessive use of motivation in explaining the frequent failure of women to complete literacy programs, notwithstanding several empirical observations that the majority of participants enrolled in literacy programs tend to be women.

Motivation is essentially a psychological concept that assumes independence and autonomy on the part of the individual, but women, especially the poor women who constitute the majority of illiterates, lead very constrained existences: not only do they engage in time-consuming survival activities but often their husbands exert significant physical and psychological control over them.

There have been few studies of the family dynamics that are set in motion as adult women seek to become literate. One such effort is a study conducted by Rockhill (1986 and 1987) of Latin American women in English literacy programs in the United States. Rockhill discovered many family obstacles to women's literacy: the husbands' reluctance to have their wives attend classes at night, the women's limited social contact with the outside world that prevented them from attaining fluency in English, the husband and family's expectations that family responsibilities came first, and frequent beatings by the husbands, which fostered a response of conflict-avoidance among women, such as not going to literacy classes for fear this might trigger some domestic violence.

The identification of men as key protagonists made possible by an explicit theoretical framework allows us to take a more analytical and sceptical view of our social and cultural institutions: the state, religion, the economy, the school system, and the family in particular. These institutions are not only social constructions but are man-made institutions (read "male-made"), and thus carry a strong gender character. For instance, there are today 24 countries where 70% or more of the women are illiterate and where the gender gap is greater than 10 percentage points (UNESCO 1988). An examination of these countries (see Table 12:1) reveals that 16 of them are primarily Muslim or Hindu, while only 8 are primarily Christian. This suggests that religions that restrict women to the domestic sphere or that foster a strong role for women as mothers also tend to limit women's access to education.

Table 12:1 Countries with Female Illiteracy rates of 70 per cent and above: (Latest Available Statistics)

| Country | Religion | | | | Country | Religion | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | H | C | A | | M | H | C | A |
| Rwanda | | | p | s | Egypt | p | | | |
| Liberia | | | p | s | Burkina Faso | p | | | p |
| Cameroon | p | | p | p | Guatemala | | | p | |
| Comoros | p | | | | Iran | p | | | |
| Libya | p | | | | Nepal | | p | | |
| Morocco | p | | | | Pakistan | p | | | |
| Mozambique | | | s | p | Saudi Arabia | p | | | |
| Namibia | | | p | | Syria | p | | | |
| Sao Tome | | | p | | Bangladesh | p | | | |
| Sudan | p | | | | India | | p | | |
| Uganda | | | p | s | Democ. Yemen | p | | | |
| Tunisia | p | | | | Papua N.Guin. | | | p | |

M = muslim, H = Hindu, C = Christian, A = Animist.
p = primary affiliation; s = secondary affiliation.

*Source*: UNESCO 1988.

This sceptical look at existing social institutions further enables us to distinguish symbolic from genuine political efforts. Thus, the understanding of the complexity and magnitude of gender subordination in a given society and how this subordination benefits men allows us to realize that when governments engage in literacy programs with little funding and scarce attention to women's needs and conditions, they are engaging in symbolic politics or strategies that sustain their legitimacy without making substantial accommodations for women.

## The Challenge of Strategy

Women today face constraints due to their reproductive functions and subsequent, but societally constructed child-rearing responsibilities. Given today's economic crises in many developing countries, from the Philippines to Cameroon, from Argentina to Zambia, poor women have greater burdens than ever before in taking care of families and children, and ensuring the survival of the family in general. The need to reduce this immediate reproductive burden has been identified by Molyneux as the practical interests of women. But in addition to these practical interests, Molyneux argues that women face strategic interests, or long-term needs that women have for changing the sexual division of labor, including the condition of women as workers, their legal rights, and their rights as autonomous citizens (Molyneux n.d.).

While it is true that in the short-run we cannot be oblivious to practical needs of women, we want eventually to move to the resolution of strategic interests. But the question of how best to reconcile these interests, and what social and political spaces should be used and when still need to be addressed. In the context of literacy programs for women, one frequent method to increase women's participation in literacy classes is to offer them when women can attend, for instance, after household work. This is sensible, but such a solution solidifies women's traditional roles as wives and homemakers. To devise programs that only consider this "solution" amounts to an accommodation by women of the status quo; what we need, in contrast, is to discuss why women and not men face this constraint. So, the first strategic challenge to literacy programs will be how to combine effectively the practical needs and the strategic needs of women, and how to move program content from a reproductive to an emancipatory focus.

A second strategic challenge will be to design literacy programs that combine political/psychological knowledge with skills that enable women to generate income. It is unquestionable that programs that enable women to increase their remunerated work and thus attain economic independence appeal greatly to them. But there is a need not only to develop the productive side of women but also to challenge their gender identity so closely linked to their reproductive role. Thus, income-generating projects must include, when relevant, not only literacy skills but such skills and collective organization, mobilization, and gender consciousness. Several observers have expressed the belief these skills cannot be offered at the same time because they would overwhelm the women and that, therefore, we should locate the "best model". In my view, such concerns are legitimate but most likely there is no one "best model". The women themselves in any particular program should determine the combinations of knowledge and skill development that they can handle.

A third strategic challenge will be the work needed to combat false dichotomies permeating much of the discourse on social and gender transformation. Often one reads, particularly in the literature produced by influential donor agencies, the dichotomy that productivity conflicts with equity. The argument insists that first we must have economic growth and the solution of basic needs, and only then can we pay attention to women's problems. "If there is nothing there, there is nothing to share", goes the common slogan associated with this dichotomy. A counter argument is that even at the lowest levels of production, there is unequal sharing. To wait until full production for equitable sharing is misleading because it defines gender as a secondary problem and, more critically, assumes that it will receive attention when the "time comes," which has proven to be extremely problematic even in socialist countries. The second dichotomy concerns that of efficiency versus equity. For instance, most people readily admit that it is desirable to have more women teachers in primary schools in many of the developing countries since this might affect positively the enrolment and retention of girls, and thus contribute effectively to their attainment of literacy skills. To increase the number of women in the teaching force it is suggested that one should lower admission standards to the teacher training colleges. But often, people voice concern that "if we lower admission standards for entry into the teaching force, this will lower the quality of education". Such an assertion ignores the fact that the majority of teachers in many developing countries are already poorly trained and that their levels of education tend to be minimal. It is difficult to imagine how lowering the admission rates of women will be a major factor in worsening the educational system when these women will represent the few who will have proper pedagogical training. The third dichotomy concerns the empowerment of women versus their "endangering" or disempowerment. This is a relatively novel argument and goes like this:

> If we empower women without offering them structural support, we might be creating a negative situation for them. For instance, what if empowered women challenge their husbands and the situation leads to divorce?

The reply here is that if so, men need women perhaps more than women need men. If women engage in subsistence production and unremunerated services to maintain a household, it is not at all certain that the low salaries of men would cover all these benefits if these were to be (and could be) acquired in the open market. Divorce need not be seen as personal failure but could represent the best alternative to untenable domestic situations. Moreover, many poor women, 30 per cent to 50 per cent, are single heads of household. A large number of them, therefore, are not dependent upon husbands. Finally, empowerment means not only enabling women to understand their situation but also enabling them to undertake collective action. A likely result of empowerment, manifested already in several cases of mobilization against the lack of basic services and domestic violence, is that support mechanisms emerge in the community by which a network of like-minded women can render assistance to other women in times of crisis or devise actions that are not predicated on single and isolated initiatives.

A fourth strategic challenge will be that of paying as much attention to the process by which literacy is attained as to the outcomes to be obtained. If we make women literate regardless of content, taking the ability to decode and encode messages separate of the content of the messages transmitted in the process and independent of how the process of learning takes place, then we are engaging in the reproduction of patriarchy even though we may believe that literacy helps women. We need to be both vigilant of how women learn and willing to utilize all existing spaces for action. In literacy programs, dealing with previously exploited and subordinated women, we need to design programs that combine the active participation of women both as beneficiaries of these programs and as key persons in the identification of the content of these programs and in the way these programs are delivered.

## The Challenge of Implementing Agency Selection

Since formal education has been delivered mainly by governments, conventional wisdom has it that governments are also the ones to run literacy programs. The incongruity of this assertion is rather obvious: the institution which did not succeed with individuals in their younger years is now expected to succeed (or to want to succeed) with the same individuals when they are adults.

Evaluations of the Education World Literacy Program (EWLP), the largest experimental effort conducted by UNESCO in the 1970s, provide interesting information about the state as an implementing agency. This effort relied exclusively on national governmental agencies for its execution. The experiment took place in 11 countries and while the evaluation did not address the issue of gender, the findings from these case studies are highly relevant to women and literacy programs.

The case studies found that the presumed advantages of the state[1] in eradicating illiteracy did not materialize. Benefits were presumed to derive from centralization of efforts, coordination, massive outreach, deliberate teacher training, and careful development of materials. The evaluation found weak state commitment in terms of training, reliance on volunteers (and thus neither monetary incentive nor esprit de corps), conflict between government agencies, poor coordination between planning agencies, curriculum insensitivity to local needs, and very few adults actually reached (UNESCO/UNDP 1976). The lack of coordination among governmental agencies continues to characterize state actions in literacy programs, according to a later report by the UNESCO Regional office for Asia and Oceania (1979).

Most government programs do not address women as a specific population. A survey by UNESCO of literacy programs focusing on women was conducted in the late 1960's (this study seems to be the only one of its kind conducted by UNESCO). This survey discovered that only seven of 108 countries reported having literacy programs that considered women's needs. But when asked what this involved, the responding countries defined them as efforts to provide women with "means to carry out more efficiently tasks as mother of the family and housewife" or to cover "feminine aspects such as child-care and sewing" (UNESCO 1970:11). This position by the state clearly validates what Street has called an "ideological" model of literacy, one of its tenets being that:

> literacy can only be known to us in forms that already have political and ideological significance and it cannot, therefore, be helpfully separated from that significance and treated as though it were an 'autonomous' thing (*ibid*. p. 8).

If such is the common pattern and if the state is interested mainly in the reproductive roles of women, there is no compelling reason why other social sectors should not be allowed in the provision of literacy. So there is a need to explore parallel organizations such as the NGOs to a greater extent. There is evidence that these groups provide tailored programs, a greater degree of community participation in program implementation and even in design, and certainly greater outreach. The challenges here are not to equate a small agency with minor effects, nor to equate state with massive outreach and genuine commitment.

The energy and commitment of some women-run NGOs is remarkable. They are not man-hating groups but civil association with a clear understanding of gender issues. I submit that their work has more theoretical clarity than many government projects. These NGOs are more likely and able to engage in holistic education for women by combining literacy with productive skills and gender consciousness. The challenge regarding the implementing agency is a challenge for the donor agencies in particular. Their task here should be to identify the effective or promising NGOs and fund them beyond literacy program support to enable them to become stable and eventually self-sustaining institutions. This will require that feminist and profeminist officials in these agencies (a) convince their colleagues of the need to consider institutions other than the state in the provision of literacy and (b) that support for the NGOs be expanded to include support for infrastructure, training, and administration.

## The Challenge of Research

Many aspects concerning women's literacy remain to be investigated. The dearth of studies concerning literacy and particularly women's literacy is appalling considering the magnitude of the problem. Such a lack, unfortunately, is not surprising because academia reflects the priorities of the rest of society and literacy has yet to be seen as an educational issue of significance. While research is important, it also has to be underscored that the mere production of new knowledge will not guarantee subsequent action. Therefore, the types of research concerning the literacy of women should be of a particular nature, as we discuss below.

The areas to be investigated could be grouped under four major categories, each with its own set of questions to be examined:

A. Pedagogical considerations.

   - Why do women tend to enroll more than men even if time and every constraints are so strong?

- What are the effective pedagogical strategies for adult women? For instance, what are effective combinations of text and visual stimuli?
- What combinations of literacy and conscientization skills are feasible? How can they be effectively promoted?
- What are the effective characteristics/abilities of literacy teachers working with women? How can these characteristics/abilities be developed through training?

B. Family/household-related considerations.

- What physical and psychological constraints to women's participation in literacy programs operate at the household level?
- In what ways do the involvement of women in literacy programs and their attainment of literacy skills threaten/modify the hierarchy of their households?
- What tactics do husbands and relatives use to prevent women from acquiring literacy?

C. Societal considerations.

- What are the kinds of supportive services women need to complete literacy programs?
- How can we move from practical to strategic interest satisfaction? What successful instances are there?
- What degree of "successful" literacy for women can be expected when societal and economic supports are missing?
- What societal conditions are needed to promote women's retention of literacy skills?

D. State-related considerations.

- Under what political and economic conditions will the state support a serious provision of literacy skills to women?

- What are the instances of successful literacy programs conducted by state agencies? What measures of "success" are used in these programs?

These questions will have to be addressed through research of a qualitative nature: documenting practices, reporting subtle but cumulative events through the use of in-depth interviews and case studies, observing the persistent role of significant others as blocking agents, identifying variations across the life cycle, and examining the use and impact of discursive practices[2].

A second important research challenge in literacy will be the production of knowledge through a research process in which the illiterate women are themselves a part. This will require breaking the subject/object dichotomy, that is to say, looking at women and enabling them to look at themselves. Action research and participatory research, therefore, will have to be considered in literacy studies for the processes and outcomes of adult literacy are inexorably linked.

## The Challenge of Policy Implementation

There are in existence several international declarations and even laws that recognize the importance of women's education. In 1970 the UN officially recognized the need of literacy for women. In 1982, at the 4th extraordinary session of the UN General Conference, UNESCO and the UN recognized the need to work simultaneously with primary education and adult literacy programs. Since these official commitments have already been made, developing countries asking for international development assistance should be reminded of these declarations.

Another important leverage concerns the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. This convention, which has the force of international law, has been ratified by 54 countries (Sivard 1985) and thus stands as a critical precedent in the conduct of human affairs. Article 16 of this convention gives women and men equal rights in marriage and decision on the number and spacing of children. Significantly, most of the countries which have not yet ratified the convention include African and Arab countries with high rates of female illiteracy. This is an area where international pressure may have to be brought to bear in order to affect positively the educational levels of women.

While laws and official commitment exist, their follow-up with concrete programming has been lagging. The challenge here for feminists and profeminists will be twofold. First, they must lobby governments to force their attention upon adult educational programs, traditionally the forgotten component in the educational system. Second, feminists and profeminists, particularly in developed countries, must convince their international aid agencies to use social groups outside the state or parallel to it for the provision of literacy for women.

## Conclusions

The challenges facing the literacy of women are serious, even formidable. But this does not mean that they cannot be successfully met. They will have to be considered simultaneously and they will need persistent attention. Action without theory, decoding/encoding skills without an understanding of how oppression emerges, the unquestioned used of state agencies, the accumulation of unanswered questions regarding literacy processes, and legislation without enforcement will continue to plague literacy programs for women unless women and men committed to social transformation pool resources and take a long-term stand.

The international literacy year of 1990 is a welcome measure to bring attention to the problem of literacy but even a decade of attention and financial assistance will not be enough. New actors - particularly women and NGOs - must be included in future efforts. States will have to learn to work with parallel organizations. Finally, men will have to be persuaded that while some differences between men and women do exist, the differences of a biological nature are much smaller than those which have been socially constructed. Men will also have to be persuaded that they can have fuller lives as a new social order emerges. A yet-to-be explained phenomenon is that women currently live longer than men by an average of seven years, in both the developed and developing countries[3]. Could the redefinition of gender roles perhaps alter present longevity statistics? Could the promise of a longer life perhaps convince some men to try new ways? If so, to the five challenges described above, we could add one great hope.

## Notes

1. States are different in their degrees of commitment to democracy, their attitudes *vis-à-vis* the open market, and the provision of social services. However, they tend to coincide in considering women a second priority in many of the policies they formulate. This has been amply documented in examinations of women's conditions in socialist and capitalist countries, as well as in old new nations. Exceptions do exist, such as the case of Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands.
2. Research identifying popular sayings with negative references to women in a particular country, such as that reported by Junge and Eshete (1989) for Ethiopia, offer significant promise for capturing the influential but elusive social representations of the women's roles.
3. By ages 45-50 in developed countries and 60-65 in developing countries, men decrease noticeably in numbers compared to women. Men also have shorter lives in urban than rural areas. See UN, 1988, for compelling data showing the longevity of men and women across 15 different age groups.

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